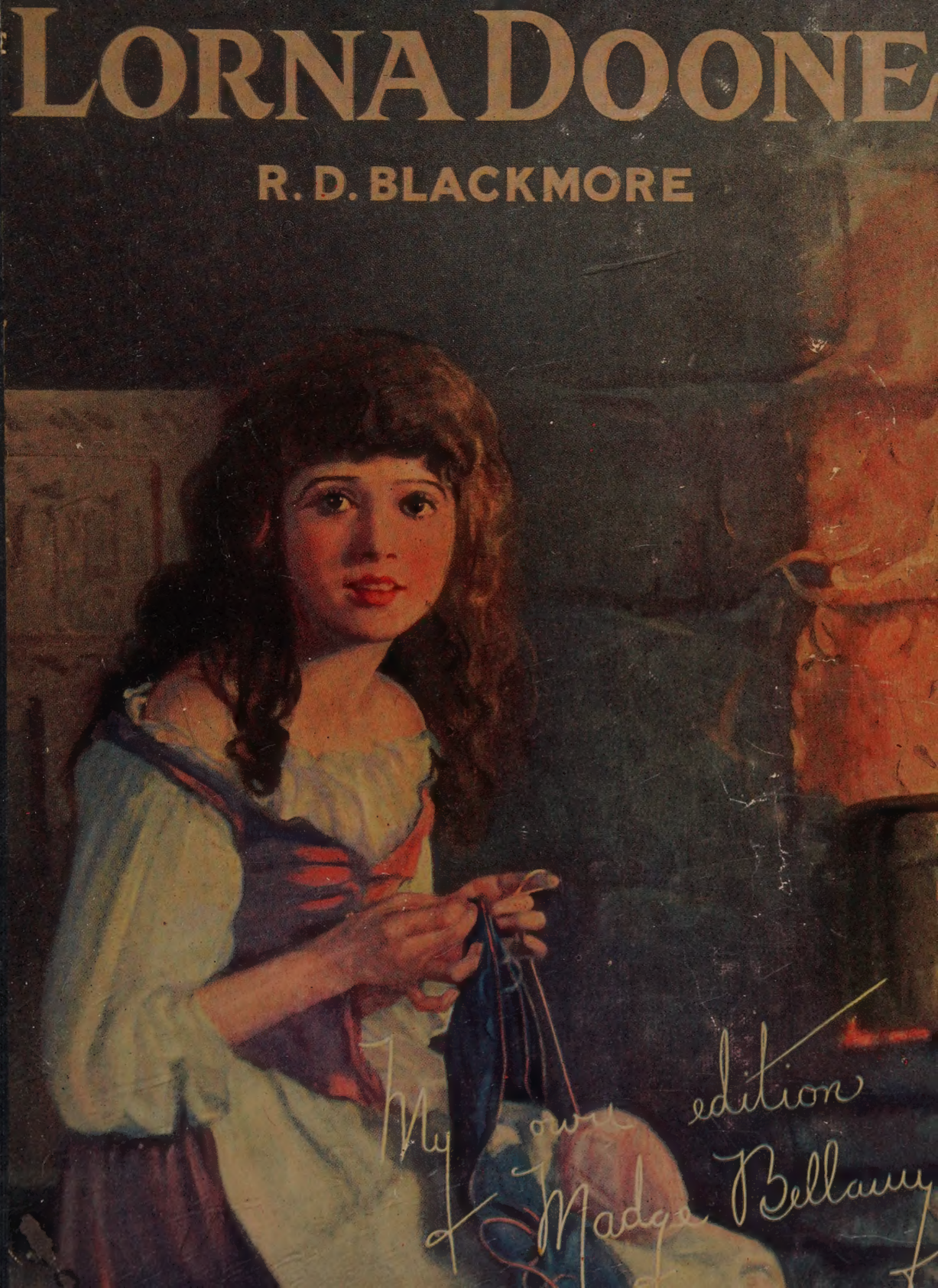
LORNA DOONE

R. D. BLACKMORE



This is my own authorized edition:
It comes to you with my best wishes
for your happiness and prosperity

Sincerely
Madge Bellamy

MADGE BELLAMY AS LORNA DOONE

MADGE BELLAMY EDITION

LORNA DOONE

R. D. BLACKMORE

Edited By
CAROLYN SHERWIN BAILEY

Illustrated in Color By
HAROLD BRETT

And Duo-Tone Prints
of Scenes from the
Photo-Play Produced By
MAURICE TOURNEUR
at the Studio of
THOMAS H. INCE

MILTON BRADLEY COMPANY
SPRINGFIELD · MASSACHUSETTS

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PREFACE TO THE MADGE BELLAMY EDITION

The progress of the motion picture from aimless entertainment to the high art of its present standard has developed a need for pictorical presentation of the great stories of all time.

Through a transition of various stages of development, technical and artistic, the screen has come to a new responsibility — a period where its obligations extend beyond mere amusement.

"Lorna Doone" is one of the most appealing stories of English literature. It is rich in drama, full of romance, adventure and beauty. Its pictorial possibilities were realized long ago and several efforts were made to screen it but, in incapable hands, they fell far short of the production such a beautiful story demanded.

Mr. Maurice Tourneur, known as the poet of the screen, has created a pictorial version of this classic of English literature at my studios in California, which will endure for many generations as a fitting presentation of this wonderful story.

He spent months in painstaking preparation that every detail might be perfect. Many more months were required for actual production with such notable players as Madge Bellamy, Frank Keenan, John Bowers, etc., making of "Lorna Doone" as fine a photo-drama as resources and genius could create.

Such an achievement as Mr. Tourneur's presentation of "Lorna Doone" brings the screen to a greater importance in the world of literature and gives the photo-play its rightful place among the arts, a medium of dramatic presentation higher than entertainment alone.

Thos. H. Ince

Thomas H. Ince Studios,
Culver City, Cal.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	An Important Item	1
II	The War-Path of the Doones	7
III	A Very Rash Visit	15
IV	Hard It Is To Climb	22
V	A Boy and a Girl	29
VI	A Brave Rescue and a Rough Ride	35
VII	A Man Justly Popular	42
VIII	Master Huckaback Comes In	47
IX	Master Huckaback Fails of Warrant	53
X	John Is Clearly Bewitched	58
XI	Lorna Tells Her Story	65
XII	A Royal Invitation	73
XIII	A Great Man Attends to Business	80
XIV	John Is Drained and Cast Aside	88
XV	John Has Hope of Lorna	95
XVI	Annie Gets the Best of It	101
XVII	John Fry's Errand	107
XVIII	An Early Morning Call	112
XIX	John Returns to Business	118
XX	A Very Desperate Venture	124
XXI	A Good Turn for Jeremy	130
XXII	A Troubled State	137
XXIII	Two Fools Together	143
XXIV	Not Too Soon	149
XXV	Brought Home at Last	155
XXVI	Squire Faggus Makes Some Lucky Hits	162
XXVII	Jeremy in Danger	169
XXVIII	Every Man Must Defend Himself	175
XXIX	Maiden Sentinels Are Best	180
XXX	A Visit From the Counsellor	186

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXXI	Jeremy Finds Out Something	193
XXXII	Mutual Discomfiture	201
XXXIII	Getting Into Chancery	207
XXXIV	John Becomes Too Popular	214
XXXV	Lorna Knows Her Nurse	222
XXXVI	Master Huckaback's Secret	232
XXXVII	Lorna Gone Away	239
XXXVIII	Therefore He Seeks Comfort	247
XXXIX	The King Must Not Be Prayed For	252
XL	John Is Worsted By the Women	261
XLI	Slaughter in the Marshes	269
XLII	Falling Among Lambs	275
XLIII	Suitable Devotion	283
XLIV	Lorna Still Is Lorna	290
XLV	John Is John No Longer	298
XLVI	Compelled to Volunteer	310
XLVII	A Long Account Settled	317
XLVIII	The Counsellor and the Carver	322
XLIX	How to Get Out of Chancery	330
L	Driven Beyond Endurance	336
LI	Life and Lorna Come Again	343

ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
Madge Bellamy as Lorna Doone	*Frontispiece*
Tom Faggus stopped to sup that night with us	44
By the side of the stream Lorna was coming to me	58
Lorna told me about everything that I wished to know	62
Lorna and Sir Ensor Doone	66
"John Ridd, if thou hast any value for thy body or thy soul, have nought to do with any Doone"	74
I came to Dunstertown, having walked all the way from London	92
Sir Ensor defends Lorna from a forced betrothal to Carver Doone	98
What could I do at her mournful tone but kiss the hand which she put up to warn me	104
Only one thing I remember—she raised her bright lips to me	114
Who are you there? Answer! one, two, three, and I fire	126
Our very best sheep-dog, Old Watch, had chosen to accompany me that day	144
It was the sweetest labor — pulling Lorna to our own farmhouse	158
"All go away, except my mother," I said very quietly	160
Although it was the longest winter ever known in our parts, to me it was the very shortest and the most delicious	164
In the settle was my Lorna, propped with pillows	172
He tried a pistol at me, but I was too quick for him	184
Before the waves came into the coach, a score of fierce men were around it	198
Lorna had made of this place a haven of beauty to dwell in	212
Lorna in her perfect beauty, stood before the crimson folds	290
The sound of a shot rang through the church — Lorna fell as I was going to kiss her	338
For the first time in his life Carver Doone had found his master	340
It was not a moment to describe, who feels can never tell it	348

The sun sinks low o'er the moors to-night,
The lonely moors of Devon, —
And the land of Lorna Doone is bright
From the great red glow of heaven.
Oh, the men who fought and the girl who loved
Sleep deep 'neath the silent moon, —
But romance lives long, like a deathless song,
In the land of Lorna Doone.

The world may last for a thousand years,
And thousands more thereafter,
But through all its joys and all its fears
There'll be always love and laughter.
Oh, the lads will fight and the lasses dream
Of love and a honeymoon, —
And for me and you there's a heart beats true
As the heart of Lorna Doone.

—From the Song "Lorna Doone."

Lyric by Arthur A. Penn
Set to music by Frederick W. Vanderpool
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LORNA DOONE

A ROMANCE OF EXMOOR

CHAPTER I

AN IMPORTANT ITEM

IF anybody cares to read a simple tale told simply, I, John Ridd, of the parish of Oare, in the county of Somerset, yeoman and churchwarden, have seen and had a share in some doings of this neighborhood, which I will try to set down in order.

My father being of good substance, at least as we reckon in Exmoor, and seized in his own right, from many generations, of one of the three farms into which our parish is divided, he sent me, his only son, to be schooled at Tiverton, in the county of Devon. For the chief boast of that ancient town, next to its woolen staple, is a worthy grammar-school, the largest in the west of England, founded and handsomely endowed in the year 1604 by Master Peter Blundell, of that same place, clothier.

Now the cause of my leaving Tiverton school, and the way of it, were as follows. On the 29th day of November, in the year of our Lord 1673, the very day when I was twelve years old, and had spent all my substance in sweetmeats, with which I made treat to the little boys, till the large boys ran in and took them, we came out of school at five o'clock, as the rule is upon Tuesdays. We were leaning quite at dusk against the iron bars of the gate, some six, or it may be seven, of us, small boys all. There was plenty of room for all of us for, the gate will hold nine boys close-packed, unless they be fed rankly, whereof is little danger; and now we were looking out on the road and wishing we could get there.

A certain boy leaning up against me would not allow my elbow room, and struck me very sadly in the stomach part, though his

own was full of my sweets. And this I felt so unkindly, that I smote him straightway in the face without tarrying to consider it, or weighing the question duly. Upon this he put his head down, and presented it so vehemently at the middle of my waistcoat, that for a minute or more my breath seemed dropped, as it were, from my pockets, and my life seemed to stop from great want of ease. Before I came to myself again it had been settled for us that we should move to the "Ironing-box," as the triangle of turf is called, where the two causeways coming from the school-porch and the hall-porch meet, and our fights are mainly celebrated. But suddenly there came round the side of Lowman bridge a very small string of horses, only two, indeed, counting for one the pony, and a red-faced man on the bigger nag.

"Plaise ye, worshipful masters," he said, being feared of the gateway, "carn'e tull whur our Jan Ridd be?"

"Hyur a be, ees fai, Jan Ridd," answered a sharp little chap, making game of John Fry's language.

"Zhow un up, then," says John Fry, poking his whip through the bars at us; "zhow un up, and putt un aowt."

The other little chaps pointed at me, and some began to holla; but I knew what I was about.

"Oh, John, John," I cried, "what's the use of your coming now, and Peggy over the moors, too, and it so cruel cold for her? The holidays don't begin till Wednesday fortnight, John. To think of you not knowing that!"

John Fry leaned forward in the saddle, and turned his eyes away from me; and then there was a noise in his throat like a snail crawling on a window-pane.

"Oh, us knaws that wull enough, Maister Jan; reckon every Oare man knaw that, without go to skoo-ull, like you doth. Your moother have kept arl the apples up, and old Betty toorned the black puddens, and none dare set trap for a blagbird. Arl for thee, lad; every bit of it now for thee!"

He checked himself suddenly, and frightened me. I knew our John Fry's way so well.

"And father, oh, how is father?" I pushed the boys right and

left as I said it. "John, is father up in town? He always used to come for me, and leave nobody else to do it."

"Vayther'll be at the crooked post, t'other zide o' telling-house.* Her coodn't lave 'ouze by raison of the Christmas bakkon comin' on, and zome o' the cider welted."

He looked at the nag's ears as he said it; and, being up to John Fry's ways, I knew that it was a lie. And my heart fell like a lump of lead, and I leaned back on the stay of the gate, and longed no more to fight anybody. I did not even care to stroke the nose of my pony Peggy, although she pushed it in through the rails, where a square of broader lattice is, and sniffed at me, and began to crop gently after my fingers. But whatever lives or dies, business must be attended to; and the principal business of boys is, beyond all controversy, to fight with one another.

"Come up, Jack," said one of the boys, lifting me under the chin; "he hit you, and you hit him, you know."

"Pay your debts before you go," said a monitor, striding up to me, after hearing how the honor lay; "Ridd, you must go through with it."

"Nay," I said, with my back against the wrought-iron stay of the gate, "I will not fight thee now, Robin Snell, but wait till I come back again."

"Take coward's blow, Jack Ridd, then," cried half a dozen little boys, shoving Bob Snell forward to do it; because they all knew well enough, having striven with me ere now, and proved me to be their master—they knew, I say, that without great change I would never accept that contumely. But I took little heed of them, looking in dull wonderment at John Fry and Peggy.

"Shall I fight, John?" I said at last; "I would an you had not come, John."

"I zin thee had better faight, Jan," he answered, in a whisper, through the gridiron of the gate; "there be a dale of faighting avore thee. Best wai to begin gude taime laike. Wull the geat-man latt me in, to zee as thee hast vair plai, lad?"

He looked doubtfully down at the color of his cowskin boots, and the mire upon the horses, for the sloughs were exceeding

*The "telling-houses" on the moor are rude cots where the shepherds meet, to "tell" their sheep at the end of the pasturing season.

mucky. Peggy, indeed, my sorrel pony, being lighter of weight, was not crusted much over the shoulders; but Smiler, our youngest sledder, had been well in over his withers, and none would have deemed him a piebald, save of red mire and black mire. John Fry's sad-colored Sunday hat was indued with a plume of marsh-weed. All this I saw while he was dismounting, heavily and wearily, lifting his leg from the saddle-cloth as if with a sore crick in his back.

The great boys stood in a circle around, being gifted with strong privilege, and the little boys had leave to lie flat and look through the legs of the great boys. I marvel how Robin Snell felt. Very likely he thought nothing of it, always having been a boy of an hectoring and unruly sort. But I felt my heart go up and down as the boys came round to strip me; and greatly fearing to be beaten, I blew hot upon my knuckles. Then pulled I off my little cut jerkin and laid it down on my cap, and over that my waistcoat, and a boy was proud to take care of them—Thomas Hooper was his name, and I remember how he looked at me. My mother had made that little cut jerkin, in the quiet winter evenings, and taken pride to loop it up in a fashionable way, and I was loath to soil it with blood, and good filberts were in the pocket.

Then up to me came Robin Snell and he stood very square, and looked at me, and I lacked not long to look at him. Round his waist he had a kerchief busking up his small clothes, and on his feet light pumpkin shoes, and all his upper raiment off. And he danced about in a way that made my head swim on my shoulders, and he stood some inches over me. But I, being muddled with much doubt about John Fry and his errand, was only stripped of my jerkin and waistcoat, and not comfortable to begin.

"Come, now, shake hands," cried a big boy, jumping in joy of the spectacle, a third-former, nearly six feet high; "shake hands, you little devils. Keep your pluck up, and show good sport, and Lord love the better man of you."

Robin took me by the hand, and gazed at me disdainfully, and then smote me painfully in the face, ere I could get my fence up.

"Whutt be 'bout, lad?" cried John Fry; "hutt un again, Jan, wull'e? Well done, then, our Jan boy."

For I had replied to Robin now, and the strife began in a seri-

ous style, and the boys looking on were not cheated. I came to my corner, when the round was over, with very hard pumps in my chest, and a great desire to fall away.

"Time is up," cried head-monitor, ere ever I got my breath again; and when I fain would have lingered a while on the knee of the boy that held me. John Fry had come up, and the boys were laughing because he wanted a stable lanthorn, and threatened to tell my mother.

"Time is up," cried another boy, more headlong than head-monitor. "If we count three before the come of thee, thwacked thou art, and must go to the women." I felt it hard upon me. He began to count, one, two, three—but before the "three" was out of his mouth, I was facing my foe, with both hands up, and my breath going rough and hot, and resolved to wait the turn of it.

"Finish him off, Bob," cried a big boy, and that I noticed especially, because I thought it unkind of him, after eating of my toffee as he had that afternoon; "finish him off, neck and crop; he deserves it for sticking up to a man like you."

But I was not so to be finished off, though feeling in my knuckles now as if it were a blueness and a sense of chillblain. Nothing held except my legs, and they were good to help me. So this bout, or round, if you please, was fought warily by me, with gentle recollection of what my tutor, a clever boy, had told me, and some resolve to earn his praise before I came back to his knee again. And never, I think, in all my life, sounded sweeter words in my ears than when my second and backer, who had made himself part of my doings now, and would have wept to see me beaten, said:

"Famously done, Jack, famously! Only keep your wind up, Jack, and you'll go right through him!"

Meanwhile John Fry was prowling about, asking the boys what they thought of it, and whether I was like to be killed, because of my mother's trouble. But finding now that I had fought three-score fights already, he came up to me woefully, in the quickness of my breathing, while I sat on the knee of my second, with a piece of spongous coralline to ease me of my bloodshed, and he said in my ears, as if he was clapping spurs into a horse:

"Never thee knack under, Jan, or never coom naigh Hexmoor no more."

With that it was all up with me. A simmering buzzed in my heavy brain, and a light came through my eye-places. At once I set both fists again, and my heart stuck to me like cobbler's wax. Either Robin Snell should kill me, or I would conquer Robin Snell. So I went in again with my courage up, and Bob came smiling for victory, and I hated him for smiling. He let at me with his left hand, and I gave him my right between his eyes, and he blinked, and was not pleased with it. I feared him not, and spared him not, neither spared myself. My breath came again, and my heart stood cool, and my eyes struck fire no longer. Only I knew that I would die sooner than shame my birthplace. How the rest of it was I know not; only that I had the end of it, and helped to put Robin in bed.

CHAPTER II

THE WAR-PATH OF THE DOONES

FROM Tiverton town to the town of Oare is a very long and painful road, and in those days, when I came from school, it was a sad and sorry business to find where lay the highway.

We left the town of the two fords, which they say is the meaning of it, very early in the morning, after lying one day to rest, as was demanded by the nags, sore of foot and foundered. For my part, too, I was glad to rest, having aches all over me, and very heavy bruises; and we lodged at the sign of the White Horse Inn, in the street called Gold Street. Though still John Fry was dry with me of the reason of his coming, and only told lies about father, and could not keep them agreeable, I hoped for the best, as all boys will, especially after a victory. And I thought perhaps father had sent for me because he had a good harvest, and the rats were bad in the corn chamber.

It was high noon before we were got to Dulverton that day, near to which town the river Exe and its big brother Barle have union. My mother had an uncle living there, but we were not to visit his house this time, at which I was somewhat astonished, since we needs must stop for at least two hours, to bait our horses thorough well, before coming to the black bogway.

John had been rather bitter with me, which methought was a mark of ill-taste at coming home for the holidays, but, now, at Dulverton, we dined upon the rarest and choices victuals that ever I did taste. Hot mutton pasty was a thing I had often heard of from very wealthy boys, who made a dessert of dinner; and to hear them talk of it made my lips smack, and my ribs come inwards.

And now John Fry strode into the hostel, with the air and grace of a short-legged man, and shouted as loud as if he was calling sheep upon Exmoor:

"Hot mootton pasty for twoo trarv'lers, at number vaive, in vaive minnits! Dish un up in the tin with the grahvy, zame as I hardered last Tuesday."

When the mutton pasty was done, and Peggy and Smiler had dined well also, out I went to wash at the pump, being a lover of soap and water, at all risk, except of my dinner.

Then a lady's maid came out. With a long Italian glass in her fingers very daintily, she came up to the pump in the middle of the yard, where I was running the water off all my head and shoulders and arms. "Good leetle boy," she said to me, "come hither to me. Fine heaven! how blue your eyes are, and your skin like snow; but some naughty man has beaten it black. Oh, leetle boy, let me feel it. Ah, how then it must have hurt you! There now, and you shall love me."

All this time she was touching me here and there, very lightly, with her delicate brown fingers, and I understood from her voice and manner that she was not of this country, but a foreigner by extraction. And then I was not so shy of her, because I could talk better English than she; and yet I longed for my jerkin, but liked not to be rude to her.

"If you please, madam, I must go. John Fry is waiting by the tapster's door, and Peggy neighing to me. If you please, we must get home tonight; and father will be waiting for me this side of the telling-house."

"There, there, you shall go, leetle dear, and perhaps I will go after you. I have taken much love of you. But the baroness is hard to me. How far you call it now to the bank of the sea at Wash—Wash—"

"At Watchett, likely you mean, madam. Oh, a very long way, and the road's as soft as the road to Oare."

"Oh-ah, Oh-ah—I shall remember; that is the place where my leetle boy live, and some day I will come seek for him."

Upon this, she retreated up the yard, with a certain dark dignity, and a foreign way of walking.

Now, up to the end of Dulverton town, on the northward side of it, where the two new pigsties be, the Oare folk and the Watchett folk must trudge on together, until we come to a broken cross,

where a murdered man lies buried. Peggy and Smiler went up the hill, as if nothing could be too much for them after the beans they had eaten, and suddenly turning a corner of trees, we happened upon a great coach and six horses laboring very heavily. John Fry rode on with his hat in his hand, as became him, towards the quality; but I was amazed to that degree that I left my cap on my head, and drew bridle without knowing it.

For on the front seat of the coach, which was half way open, being of new city make, and the day in want of air, sat the foreign lady who had met me at the pump and offered to salute me. By her side was a little girl, dark-haired and very wonderful, with a wealthy softness on her, as if she must have her own way. I could not look at her for two glances, and she did not look at me for one, being such a little child, and busy with the hedges. But in the honorable place sat a handsome lady, very warmly dressed, and sweetly delicate of color. And close to her was a lively child, two, or it may be three, years old, bearing a white cockade in his hat, and staring at all and everybody. Now he saw Peggy, and took such a liking to her that the lady, his mother—if so she were—was forced to look at my pony and me. And, to tell the truth, although I am not of those who adore the high folk, she looked at us very kindly, and with a sweetness rarely found in the women who milk the cows for us.

Then I took off my cap to the beautiful lady, without asking wherefore; and she put up her hand and kissed it to me, thinking, perhaps, that I looked like a gentle and good little boy; for folk always called me innocent, though I never was that. But now the foreign lady, or lady's maid, as it might be, who had been busy with little dark eyes, turned upon all this going on, and looked me straight in the face. I was about to salute her—at a distance, indeed, and not with the nicety she had offered to me—but, strange to say, she stared at my eyes as if she had never seen me before, neither wished to see me again. At this I was so startled, such things being out of my knowledge, that I startled Peggy also with the muscle of my legs, and she being fresh from stable, and the mire scraped off with cask hoop, broke away so suddenly that I could do no more than turn round and lower my cap, now five

months old, to the beautiful lady. Soon I overtook John Fry, and asked him all about them, and how it was that we had missed their starting from the hostel. But John could not say.

We saw no more of them after that, but turned into the sideway, and soon had the fill of our hands and eyes to look to our own going. For the road got worse and worse, until there was none at all. But we pushed on as best we might, with doubt of reaching home any time, except by special grace of God. The fog came down upon the moors as thick as ever I saw it, and there was no sound of any sort, nor a breath of wind to guide us. Soon it was too dark to see anything except the creases in the dusk, where prisoned light crept up the valleys.

After a while even that was gone, and no other comfort left us except to see our horses' heads jogging to their footsteps, and the dark ground pass below us, lighter where the wet was; and then the splash, foot after foot, more clever than we can do it, and the orderly jerk of the tail, and the smell of what a horse is.

John Fry was bowing forward with sleep upon his saddle, and now I could no longer see the frizzle of wet upon his heard—for he had a very brave one, of a bright-red color, and trimmed into a whale oil knot. But still I could see the jog of his hat—a Sunday hat with a top to it—and some of his shoulder bowed out in the mist.

"Where be us now?" said John Fry, waking suddenly; "us ought to have passed hold hash, Jan. Zeen it on the road, have 'e?"

"No, indeed, John; no old ash. Nor nothing else to my knowing; nor heard nothing, save thee snoring."

"Watt a vule thee must be then, Jan; and me myzell no better. Hearken, lad, hearken!"

We drew our horses up and listened, through the thickness of the air, and with our hands laid to our ears. There came a mellow noise, very low and mournsome, not a sound to be afraid of, but to long to know the meaning, with a soft rise of the hair. Three times it came and went again, as the shaking of a thread might pass away into the distance; and then I touched John Fry to know that there was something near me.

"Have they hanged one of the Doones, then, John?"

"Hush, lad; niver talk laike o' thiccy. Hang a Doone! The king would hang pretty quick if he did."

'Then who is it in the chains, John?"

I felt my spirit rise as I asked; for now I had crossed Exmoor so often as to hope that the people sometimes deserved it, and think that it might be a lesson to the rogues who unjustly loved the mutton they were never born to. But, of course, they were born to hanging, when they set themselves so high.

"It be nawbody," said John, "vor us to make a fush about. Belong to t'other zide o' the moor, and come staling shape to our zide. Red Jem Hannaford his name, lad; and good cess to his soul for craikin' zo."

So the sound of the quiet swinging led us very modestly, as it came and went on the wind, loud and low pretty regularly, even as far as the foot of the gibbet where the four crossways are. I was sorry for Red Jem, and wanted to know more about him, and whether he might not have avoided this miserable end, and what his wife and children thought of it, if, indeed, he had any. But John would talk no more about it; and perhaps he was moved with a lonesome feeling, as the creaking sound came after us.

"Hould thee tongue, lad," he said, sharply; "us be naigh the Doone track now, too maile from Dunkery Beacon hill, the haighest place of Hexmoor. So happen they be abroad tonaight, we must crawl on our belly-places, boy."

I knew at once what he meant—those bloody Doones of Bagworthy, the awe of all Devon and Somerset, outlaws, traitors, murderers. My little legs began to tremble to and fro upon Peggy's sides, as I heard the dead robber in chains behind us, and thought of the live ones still in front.

"But, John," I whispered, warily, sidling close to his saddle-bow; "dear John, you don't think they will see us in such a fog as this?"

"Never was vog as could stop their eyesen," he whispered in answer, fearfully; "here us be by the hollow ground. Zober, lad, goo zober now, if thee wish to see thy moother."

For I was inclined, in the manner of boys, to make a run of the danger, and cross the Doone track at full speed; to rush for it, and

be done with it. But even then I wondered why he talked of my mother so, and said not a word of father.

We were come to a long trough among wild hills, falling towards the plain country. We rode very carefully down our side, and through the soft grass at the bottom, and all the while we listened as if the air was a speaking trumpet. Then gladly we breasted our nags to the rise, and were coming to the comb of it, when I heard something, and caught John's arm, and he bent his hand to the shape of his ear. It was the sound of horses' feet knocking up through splashy ground, as if the bottom sucked them. Then a grunting of weary men, and the lifting noise of stirrups, and sometimes the clank of iron mixed with the wheezy croning of leather, and the blowing of hairy nostrils.

"God's sake, Jack, slip round her belly, and let her go where she wull."

As John Fry whispered, so I did, for he was off Smiler by this time; but our two steeds were too fagged to go far, and began to nose about and crop, sniffing more than they need have done. I crept to John's side very softly, with the bridle on my arm.

"Let goo braidle; let goo, lad. Plaise God they take them for forest ponies, or they'll zend a bullet through us."

I saw what he meant, and let go the bridle; for now the mist was rolling off, and we were against the sky line to the dark cavalcade below us. John lay on the ground by a barrow of heather, where a little gullet was, and I crept to him, afraid of the noise I made in dragging my legs along, and the creak of my cord breeches. John bleated like a sheep to cover it—a sheep very cold and trembling.

Then, just as the foremost horseman passed, scarce twenty yards below us, a puff of wind came up the glen, and the fog rolled off before it. And suddenly a strong red light spread like fingers over the moorland, opened the alleys of darkness, and hung on the steel of the riders.

"Dunkery Beacon," whispered John, so close into my ear that I felt his lips and teeth ashake; "dursn't fire it now excep' to show the Doones way home again, since the naight as they went up and throwed the watchmen atop of it. Why, wutt be 'bout, lad?"

For I could keep still no longer, but wriggled away from his arm, and along the little gullet, still going flat on my breast and thighs, until I was under a gray patch of stone, with a fringe of dry fern round it; there I lay, scarce twenty feet above the heads of the riders, and I feared to draw my breath, though prone to do it with wonder.

The beacon fire leaped into the rocky mouth of the glen below me, where the horsemen passed in silence, scarcely deigning to look round. Heavy men and large of stature, reckless how they bore their guns or how they sate their horses, with leathern jerkins, and long boots, and iron plates on breast and head, plunder heaped behind their saddles, and flagons slung in front of them; more than thirty went along, like clouds upon red sunset. Some had carcasses of sheep swinging with their skins on, others had deer, and one had a child flung across his saddlebow.

Whether the child were dead or alive was beyond my vision, only it hung head downwards there, and must take the chance of it. They had got the chlid, a very young one, for the sake of the dress, no doubt, which they could not stop to pull off from it; for the dress shone bright, where the fire struck it, as if with gold and jewels. I longed in my heart to know most sadly what they would do with the little thing, and whether they would eat it.

It touched me so to see that child a prey among those vultures, that in my foolish rage and burning I stood up and shouted to them, leaping on a rock, and raving out of all possession. Two of them turned round, and one set his carbine at me, but the other said it was but a pixy, and bade him keep his powder. Little they knew, and less thought I, that the pixy then before them would dance their castle down one day.

John Fry, who in the spring of fright, had brought himself down from Smiler's side as if he were dipped in oil, now came up to me, all risk being over, cross and stiff, and aching sorely from his wet couch of heather.

"Small thanks to thee, Jan, as my new waife bain't a widder. And who be you to zupport of her, and her son, if she have one? Zarve thee right if I was to chuck thee down into the Doone track. Zim thee'll come to un, zooner or later, if this be the zample of thee."

However, I answered nothing at all, except to be ashamed of myself; and soon we found Peggy and Smiler in company, well embarked on the homeward road, and victualling where the grass was good. Right glad they were to see us again.

My father never came to meet us, at either side of the telling-house, neither at the crooked post, nor even at home, although the dogs kept such a noise that he must have heard us. Under the ashen hedgerow, where father taught me to catch blackbirds, all at once my heart went down, and all my breast was hollow. There was not even the lanthorn light on the peg against the cow's house, and nobody said "Hold your noise!" to the dogs, or shouted "Here our Jack is!"

I looked at the posts of the gate, in the dark, because they were tall, like father, and then at the door of the harness room where he used to smoke his pipe and sing. Then I thought he had guests perhaps—people lost upon the moors—whom he could not leave unkindly, even for his son's sake. And yet about that I was jealous, and ready to be vexed with him, when he should begin to make much of me. And I felt in my pocket for the new pipe which I had brought him from Tiverton, and said to myself, "He shall not have it until tomorrow morning."

Woe is me! How I knew I know not—only that I slunk away, without a tear, or thought of weeping, and hid me in a saw pit. There the timber overhead came like streaks across me; and all I wanted was to lack, and none to tell me anything.

By and by a noise came down, as of woman's weeping; and there my mother and sister were, choking and holding together. Although they were my dearest loves, I could not bear to look at them, until they seemed to want my help, and put their hands before their eyes.

CHAPTER III

A VERY RASH VISIT

MY dear father had been killed by the Doones of Bagworthy, while riding home from Porlock market on the Saturday evening. With him were six brother farmers. The robbers had no grudge against him; for he had never flouted them, neither made overmuch of outcry, because they robbed other people. For he was a man of such strict honesty and due parish feeling, that he knew it to be every man's own business to defend himself and his goods; unless he belonged to our parish, and then we must look after him.

These seven good farmers were jogging along, singing to keep their courage moving, when suddenly a horseman stopped in the starlight full across them.

By dress and arms they knew him well and by his size and stature, shown against the glimmer of the evening star; and though he seemed one man to seven, it was in truth one man to one. Of the six there was not one but pulled out his money to this Doone.

But father set his staff above his head, and rode at the Doone robber. With the trick of his horse the wild man escaped the sudden onset, although it must have amazed him sadly that any durst resist him. Then when Smiler was carried away with the dash and the weight of my father, not being brought up to battle, nor used to turn, save in plough harness, the outlaw whistled upon his thumb and plundered the rest of the yeomen. But father, drawing at Smiler's head to try to come back and help them, was in the midst of a dozen men, who seemed to come out of a turf-rick, some on horse, and some afoot. Nevertheless, he smote lustily, so far as he could see; and being of great size and strength, and his blood well up, they had no easy job with him. With the play of his wrist he cracked three or four crowns, being always famous at single-

stick; until the rest drew their horses away, and he thought that he was master, and would tell his wife about it.

But a man beyond the range of staff was crouching by the peat-stack, with a long gun set to his shoulder, and he got poor father against the sky, and I cannot tell the rest of it. Only they knew that Smiler came home with blood upon his withers, and father was found in the morning dead on the moor, with his ivy-twisted cudgel lying broken under him.

It was more of woe than wonder, being such days of violence, that mother knew herself a widow and her children fatherless. Of children there were only three, none of us fit to be useful yet, only to comfort mother by making her to work for us. I, John Ridd, was the eldest, and felt it a heavy thing on me; next came sister Annie, with about two years between us; and then the little Eliza.

Now, before I got home and found my sad loss—and no boy ever loved his father better than I loved mine—mother had done a most wondrous thing. Upon the Monday morning, while her husband lay unburied, she cast a white hood over her hair, and gathered a black cloak round her, and taking counsel of no one, set off on foot for the Doone gate.

In the early afternoon she came to the hollow and barren entrance, where in truth there was no gate, only darkness to go through. Enough that no gun was fired at her, only her eyes were covered over, and somebody led her by the hand without any wish to hurt her.

A very rough and headstrong road was all that she remembered. At the end of this road they delivered her eyes, and she could scarce believe them.

For she stood at the head of a deep green valley, carved from out the mountains in a perfect oval, with a fence of sheer rock standing round it, eighty feet or a hundred high, from whose brink black wooded hills swept up to the sky line. Farther down, on either bank, were covered houses built of stone, square and roughly cornered. Only one room high they were, and not placed opposite each other, but in and out, as skittles are; only that the first of all, which proved to be the captain's, was a sort of double house, or, rather two houses joined together by a plank bridge over a river.

Fourteen cots my mother counted in the quiet valley there, away from noise, and violence, and brawl. Yet not a single house stood there but was the home of murder.

Two men led my mother down a steep and gliddery stairway, as far as the house of the captain. And there at the door they left her, trembling, to speak her mind.

A tall old man, Sir Ensor Doone, came out. With his white locks moving upon his coat, he stopped and looked down at my mother, and she could not help herself but courtesy under the fixed black gazing.

"Good woman, you are none of us. Who has brought you hither?"

"I am here to ask for my husband." She could not say any more, because her heart was now too much for her, coming hard in her throat and mouth; but she opened up her eyes at him. "Sir," said my mother, being suddenly taken away with sorrow, "please to let me cry a bit."

He stood away, and seemed to know that women want no help for that. And by the way she cried he knew that they had killed her husband.

"This matter must be seen to; it shall be seen to at once," the old man said at last, moved a little in spite of all his knowledge. "Madam, if any wrong has been done, trust the honor of a Doone; I will redress it to my utmost. Come inside and rest yourself, while I ask about it. What was your good husband's name, and when and where fell this mishap?"

"Deary me," said mother, as he set a chair for her very polite, but she would not sit upon it; "Saturday morning I was a wife, sir; and Saturday night I was a widow, and my children fatherless. My husband's name was John Ridd, sir, as everybody knows. He was coming home from Porlock market and a new gown for me on the crupper, and a shell to put my hair up—oh, John, how good you were to me!"

"Madam, this is a serious thing," Sir Ensor Doone said graciously, and showing grave concern; "my boys are a little wild, I know. And yet I cannot think that they would willingly harm any one. And yet—and yet, you do look wronged. Send Counsellor to me,"

he shouted from the door of his house; and down the valley went the call, "send Counsellor to Captain."

Counsellor Doone came in ere yet my mother was herself again. A square-built man of enormous strength, he carried a long gray beard descending to the leather of his belt. Great eyebrows overhung his face like ivy on a pollard oak, and under them two large brown eyes, as of an owl. And he had a power of hiding his eyes, or showing them bright, like a blazing fire. He stood there with his beaver off, and mother tried to look at him, but he seemed not to descry her.

"Put the case," said the Counsellor.

"The case is this," replied Sir Ensor, "this lady's worthy husband was slain, it seems, upon his return from the market at Porlock, no longer ago than last Saturday night."

"Cite his name," said the Counsellor, with his eyes still rolling inwards.

"Master John Ridd, as I understand."

The square man with the long gray beard, quite unmoved by anything, drew back to the door and spoke, and his voice was like a fall of stones in the bottom of a mine.

"Few words will be enow for this. Four or five of our best-behaved and most peaceful gentlemen went to the little market at Porlock with a lump of money. They bought some household stores and comforts at a very high price, and pricked upon the homeward road, away from vulgar revellers. When they drew bridle to rest their horses, in the shelter of a peat rick, the night being dark and sudden, a robber of great size and strength rode into the midst of them, thinking to kill or terrify. His arrogance and hardihood at the first amazed them, but they would not give up without a blow goods which were on trust with them. He had smitten three of them senseless, for the power of his arm was terrible; whereupon the last man tried to ward his blow with a pistol. Carver, sir, it was, our brave and noble Carver, who saved the lives of his brethren and his own; and glad enow they were to escape. Notwithstanding, we hoped it might be only a flesh wound, and not to speed him in his sins."

As this atrocious tale of lies turned up, mother was too much

amazed to do any more than look at him, as if the earth must open. But the only thing that opened was the great brown eyes of the Counsellor, which rested on my mother's face with a dew of sorrow, as he spoke of sins.

She, unable to bear them, turned suddenly on Sir Ensor, and caught a smile on his lips and a sense of quiet enjoyment.

"All the Doones are gentlemen," answered the old man, gravely. "We are always glad to explain, madam, any mistake which the rustic people may fall upon about us; and we wish you clearly to conceive that we do not charge your poor husband with any set purpose of robbery, neither will we bring suit for any attainder of his property. Is it not so, Counsellor?"

"Without doubt his land is attainted; unless in mercy you forbear, sir."

"Counsellor, we will forbear. Madam, we will forgive him. Like enough he knew not right from wrong at that time of night."

Mother's head went round so that she courtesied to them both, scarcely knowing where she was, but calling to mind her manners. All the time she felt a warmth, as if the right was with her, and yet she could not see the way to spread it out before them. With that, she dried her tears in haste, and went into the cold air, for fear of speaking mischief.

But when she was on the homeward road, and the sentinels had charge of her, blinding her eyes as if she were not blind enough with weeping, some one came in haste behind her, and thrust a heavy leathern bag into the limp weight of her hand.

"Captain sends you this," he whispered; "take it to the little ones."

But mother let it fall in a heap, as if it had been a blind-worm; and then for the first time crouched before God, that even the Doones should pity her.

Who were the Doones?

In or about the year of our Lord 1640, when all the troubles of England were swelling to an outburst, great estates in the north country were suddenly confiscated, through some feud of families and strong influence at court, and the owners were turned upon the

world. These estates were in co-heirship, so that if either tenant died, all would come to the live one in spite of any testament.

One of the joint owners was Sir Ensor Doone, a gentleman of brisk intellect; and the other owner was his cousin, the Earl of Lorne and Dykemont.

Lord Lorne was some years the elder of his cousin, Ensor Doone, and was making suit to gain severance of the cumbersome joint tenancy by any fair apportionment, when suddenly this blow fell on them and instead of dividing the land, they were divided from it.

The nobleman was still well-to-do, though crippled in his expenditure; but as for the cousin, he was left a beggar, with many to beg from him. He thought that the other had wronged him, and that all the trouble of law befell through his unjust petition. Many friends advised him to make interest at court; for, having done no harm whatever, and being a good Catholic, which Lord Lorne was not, he would be sure to find hearing there, and probably some favor. But he, like a very hot-brained man, would have nothing to say to any attempt at making a patch of it, but drove away with his wife and sons, and the relics of his money.

Some say that, in the bitterness of that wrong and outrage, he slew a gentleman of the court, whom he supposed to have borne a hand in the plundering of his fortune. Others say that he bearded King Charles the First himself, in a manner beyond forgiveness. One thing, at any rate, is sure—Sir Ensor was attainted, and made a felon outlaw, through some violent deed ensuing upon his dispossession.

In great despair at last, he resolved to settle in some far away part, where none could be found to know him; and so, in an evil day for us, he came to the west of England. And here, when he had discovered a place which seemed almost to be made for him, so withdrawn, so self-defended, and uneasy of access, some of the country folk around brought him little offerings—a side of bacon, a keg of cider, hung mutton, or a brisket of venison—so that for a little while he was very honest. But when the newness of his coming began to wear away, and our good folk were apt to think that even a gentleman ought to work or pay other men for doing it, and

many farmers were grown weary of manners without discourse to them, and all cried out to one another how unfair it was that, owning such a fertile valley, young men would not spade or plough by reason of noble lineage—then the young Doones growing up took things they would not ask for.

Perhaps their den might well have been stormed, and themselves driven out of the forest, if honest people had only agreed to begin with them at once when first they took to plundering. But having respect for their good birth, and pity for their misfortunes, the squires and farmers and shepherds at first did nothing more than grumble gently, or even make a laugh of it, each in the case of others. After a while they found the matter gone too far for laughter, as violence and deadly outrage stained the hand of robbery, until every woman clutched her child, and every man turned pale at the very name of "Doone." For the sons and grandsons of Sir Ensor grew up in foul liberty, and haughtiness, and hatred, to utter scorn of God and man, and brutality towards dumb animals.

CHAPTER IV

HARD IT IS TO CLIMB

ABOUT two miles below our farm the Bagworthy water runs into the Lynn, and makes a real river of it. Thence it hurries away, with strength and a force of wilful waters, under the foot of a barefaced hill, and so to rocks and woods again, where the stream is covered over, and dark, heavy pools delay it. There are plenty of fish all down this way, and the farther you go the larger they get, having deeper grounds to feed in; and sometimes, in the summer months, when mother could spare me off the farm, I came down here, and caught well nigh a basketful of little trout and minnows, with a hook and a bit of worm on it, or a fern-web, or a blow-fly, hung from a hazel pulse-stik.

When I was turned fourteen years old, and put into good small clothes, buckled at the knee, and strong blue worsted hose knitted by my mother, it happened to me to explore the Bagworthy water. And it came about in this wise.

My mother had long been ailing, and not well able to eat much. Now I chanced to remember that once, at the time of the holidays, I had brought dear mother, from Tiverton, a jar of pickled loaches, caught by myself in the Lowman river, and baked in the kitchen oven, with vinegar, a few leaves of bay, and about a dozen peppercorns. And mother had said that, in all her life, she had never tasted anything fit to be compared with them.

Whether she said so good a thing out of compliment to my skill in catching the fish and cooking them, or whether she really meant it, is more than I can tell, though I quite believe the latter, and so would most people who tasted them; at any rate, I now resolved to get some loaches for her, and do them in the self-same manner, just to make her eat a bit. I can never forget that day, and how bitter cold the water was. For I doffed my shoes and hose, and put them into a bag about my neck; and left my coat at home, and tied my shirt sleeves back to my shoulders. Then I took a

three-pronged fork, firmly bound to a rod with cord, and a piece of canvas kerchief, with a lump of bread inside it; and so went into the pebbly water, trying to think how warm it was. For more than a mile all down the Lynn stream scarcely a stone I left unturned, being thoroughly skilled in the tricks of the loach, and knowing how he hides himself.

For, being gray-spotted, and clear to see through, and something like a cuttlefish, only more substantial, he will stay quite still where a streak of weed is in the rapid water, hoping to be overlooked, nor caring even to wag his tail. Then, being disturbed, he flips away, like whalebone from the finger, and hies to a shelf of stone, and lies with his sharp head poked in under it; or sometimes he bellies him into the mud, and only shows his back-ridge. And that is the time to spear him nicely.

When I had travelled two miles or so, conquered now and then with cold, and coming out to rub my legs into a lively friction, and only fishing here and there because of the tumbling water; suddenly, in an open space, where meadows spread about it, I found a good stream flowing softly into the body of our brook. And it brought, so far as I could guess by the sweep of it under my knee caps, a larger power of clear water than the Lynn itself had; only it came more quietly down, not being troubled with stairs and steps, as the fortune of the Lynn is, but gliding smoothly and forcibly, as if upon some set purpose.

Hereupon I drew up and thought, and reason was much inside me; because the water was bitter cold, and my toes were aching. So on the bank I rubbed them well with a sprout of young sting-nettle, and having skipped about a while, was kindly inclined to eat a bit.

Now all the turn of all my life hung upon that moment. But as I sat there munching a crust of our maid, Betty Muxworthy's sweet brown bread, and a bit of cold bacon along with it, and kicking my red heels against the dry loam to keep them warm, I knew no more than fish under the fork what was going on over me. It seemed a sad business to go back now and tell my sister Annie there were no loaches; and yet it was a frightful thing, knowing what I did of it, to venture where no grown man durst, up the Bag-

worthy water. And please to recollect that I was only a boy in those days, fond enough of anything new, but not like a man to meet it.

However, as I ate more and more, my spirit arose within me, and I thought of what my father had been, and how he had told me a hundred times never to be a coward. And then I grew warm, and my heart was ashamed of its pit-a-patting, and I said to myself: "Now, if father looks, he shall see that I obey him." So I put the bag round my neck again, and buckled my breeches far up from the knee, expecting deeper water, and, crossing the Lynn, went stoutly up under the branches which hang so dark on the Bagworthy river.

I found it strongly overwoven, turned, and torn with thicket wood, but not so rocky as the Lynn, and more inclined to go evenly. There were bars of chafed stakes stretched from the sides halfway across the current, and light outriders of pithy weed, and blades of last year's water grass trembling in the quiet places, like a spider's threads on the transparent stillness, with a tint of olive moving it.

Although affrighted often by the deep, dark places, and feeling that every step I took might never be taken backward, on the whole I had very comely sport of loaches, trout and minnows, forking some, and tickling some, and driving others to shallow nooks, whence I could bail them ashore. Now, if you have ever been fishing, you will not wonder that I was led on, forgetting all about danger, and taking no heed of the time, but shouting whenever I caught a "whacker," as we called a big fish at Tiverton.

But in answer to all my shouts there never was any sound at all, except of a rocky echo, or a scared bird hustling away, or the sudden dive of a water vole; and the place grew thicker and thicker, and the covert grew darker above me, until I thought that the fishes might have good chance of eating me, instead of my eating the fishes.

For now the day was falling fast behind the brown of the hill-tops, and the trees, being void of leaf, and hard, seemed giants ready to beat me. And every moment, as the sky was clearing up for a white frost, the cold of the water got worse and worse, until I was fit to cry with it. And so, in a sorry plight, I came to an open-

ing in the bushes, where a great black pool lay in front of me, whitened with snow as I thought at the sides, till I saw it was only foam-froth.

Now, though I could swim with great ease and comfort, and feared no depth of water, when I could fairly come to it, yet I had no desire to go over head and ears into this great pool. And the look of this black pit was enough to stop one from diving into it, even on a hot summer's day, with sunshine on the water; I mean, if the sun ever shone there. As it was, I shuddered and drew back, not alone at the pool itself, and the black air there was about it, but also at the whirling manner, and wisping of white threads upon it in stripy circles round and round, and the centre still as jet.

But soon I saw the reason of the stir and depth of that great pit, as well as of the roaring sound which long had made me wonder. For, skirting round one side, with very little comfort, because the rocks were high and steep, and the ledge at the foot so narrow, I came to a sudden sight and marvel, such as I never dreamed of. For, lo! I stood at the foot of a long pale slide of water, coming smoothly to me, without any break or hindrance, for a hundred yards or more, and fenced on either side with cliff, sheer and straight and shining. The water neither ran nor fell, nor leaped with any spouting, but made one even slope of it, as if it had been combed or planed, and looking like a plank of deal laid down a deep black staircase.

The look of this place had a sad effect, scaring me very greatly, and making me feel that I would give something only to be at home again, with Annie cooking my supper, and our dog, Watch, sniffing upwards. But nothing would come of wishing. So I laid the case before me in a little council; not for loss of time, but only that I wanted rest, and to see things truly.

Then says I to myself, "John Ridd, these trees and pools and lonesome rocks and setting of the sunlight are making a coward of thee. Shall I go back to my mother so, and be called her fearless boy?"

Nevertheless, I am free to own that it was not any fine sense of shame which settled my decision; for, indeed, there was nearly as much of danger in going back as in going on, and perhaps even

more of labor, the journey being so roundabout. But that which saved me from turning back was a strange, inquisitive desire, very unbecoming in a boy of little years; in a word, I would risk a great deal to know what made the water come down like that, and what there was at the top of it.

Therefore, seeing hard strife before me, I girt up my breeches anew with each buckle one hole tighter, for the sodden straps were stretching and giving, and mayhap my legs were grown smaller from the coldness of the water. Then I bestowed my fish around my neck more tightly, and not stopping to look much, for fear of fear, crawled along over the fork of rocks, where the water had scooped the stone out, and shunning thus the ledge from whence it rose like the mane of a white horse into the broad black pool, softly I let my feet into the dip and rush of the torrent.

And here I had reckoned without my host, although as I thought so clever; and it was much but what I went down into the great black pool, and had never been heard of more; and this must have been the end of me, except for my trusty loach fork. For the green wave came down like great bottles upon me, and my legs were gone off in a moment, and I had not time to cry out with wonder, only to think of my mother and Annie, and knock my head very sadly, which made it go round so that brains were no good, even if I had any. But all in a moment, before I knew aught, except that I must die out of the way, with a roar of water upon me, my fork stuck fast in the rock, and I was borne up upon it. I felt nothing except that here was another matter to begin upon; and it might be worth while, or again it might not, to have another fight for it. But presently the dash of the water upon my face revived me, and my mind grew used to the roar of it.

So I gathered my legs back slowly, as if they were fish to be landed, stopping whenever the water flew too strongly off my shinbones, and coming along without sticking out to let the wave get hold of me. And in this manner I won a footing, leaning well forward, like a draught horse, and balancing on my strength, as it were, with the ashen stake set behind me. Then I said to myself, "John Ridd, the sooner you get yourself out by the way you came, the better it will be for you." But, to my great dismay and affright-

I saw that no choice was left me now, except that I must climb, somehow, up that hill of water, or else be washed down into the pool, and whirl around it till it drowned me. For there was no chance of fetching back by the way I had gone down into it, and farther up was a hedge on either side of the waterway, rising a hundred yards in height, and, for all I could tell, five hundred, and no place to set a foot in.

Having said the Lord's Prayer, I grasped the good loach stick under a knot, and steadied me with my left hand, and so, with a sigh of despair, began my course up the fearful torrent way. To me it seemed half a mile at least of sliding water above me, but, in truth it was little more than a furlong, as I came to know afterwards. It would have been a hard ascent, even without the slippery slime and the force of the river over it, and I had scanty hope, indeed, of ever winning the summit. Nevertheless, my terror left me, now I was face to face with it, and had to meet the worst; and I set myself to do my best with a vigor and sort of hardness which did not then surprise me, but have done so ever since.

The water was only six inches deep, or from that to nine at the utmost, and all the way up I could see my feet looking white in the gloom of the hollow, and here and there I found resting place to hold on by the cliff and pant awhile. And gradually, as I went on, a warmth of courage breathed in me, to think that, perhaps, no other had dared to try that pass before me, and to wonder what mother would say to it. And then came thought of my father, also, and the pain of my feet abated.

How I went carefully, step by step, keeping my arms in front of me, and never daring to straighten my knees, is more than I can tell clearly, or even like now to think of, because it makes me dream of it. Only I must acknowledge that the greatest danger of all was just where I saw no jeopardy, but ran up a patch of black ooze-weed in a very boastful manner, being now not far from the summit.

Here I fell very piteously, and was like to have broken my knee-cap, and the torrent got hold of my other leg while I was indulging the bruised one. And then a vile knotting of cramp disabled me, and for a while I could only roar, till my mouth was full of water,

and all of my body was sliding. But the fright of that brought me to again, and my elbow caught in a rock-hold; and so I managed to start again.

Now, being in the most dreadful fright, because I was so near the top, and hope was beating within me, I labored hard, with both legs and arms going like a mill, and grunting. At last the rush of forked water, where first it came over the lips of the fall, drove me into the middle, and I stuck awhile with my toeballs on the slippery links of the pop-weed, and the world was green and gliddery, and I durst not look behind me. Then I made up my mind to die at last; for so my legs would ache no more, and my breath not pain my heart so; only it did seem such a pity after fighting so long, to give in; and the light was coming upon me, and again I fought towards it; then suddenly I felt fresh air, and fell into it headlong.

CHAPTER V

A BOY AND A GIRL

WHEN I came to myself again my hands were full of young grass and mould, and a little girl kneeling at my side was rubbing my forehead tenderly with a dock-leaf and a handkerchief.

"Oh, I am so glad," she whispered softly, as I opened my eyes and looked at her; "now you will try to be better, won't you?"

I had never heard so sweet a sound as came from between her bright red lips, while there she knelt and gazed at me; neither had I ever seen anything so beautiful as the large dark eyes intent upon me, full of pity and wonder. And then, my nature being slow and, perhaps, for that matter, heavy, I wandered with my hazy eyes down the black shower of her hair, as to my jaded gaze it seemed; and where it fell on the turf, among it like an early star was the first primose of the season. And since that day, I think of her, through all the rough storms of my life, when I see an early primrose.

Perhaps she liked my countenance, and indeed I know she did, because she said so afterwards; although at the time she was too young and I gazed at my legs and was sorry. For, although she was not at all a proud child, at any rate in her countenance, yet I knew that she was by birth a thousand years in front of me. They might have taken and trained me, or my sisters, until it was time for us to die, and then have trained our children after us, for many generations; yet never could we have gotten that look upon our faces which Lorna Doone had naturally, as if she had been born to it.

Here was I, a yeoman's boy, a yeoman every inch of me, even where I was naked; and there was she, a lady born, and thoroughly aware of it, and dressed by people of rank and taste, who took pride in her beauty and set it to advantage. For though her hair was

fallen down by reason of her wildness, and some of her frock was touched with wet where she had tended me so, behold, her dress was pretty enough for the queen of all the angels! The colors were bright and rich indeed, and the substance very sumptuous, yet simple, and free from tinsel stuff, and matching most harmoniously. All from her waist to her neck was white, plaited in close like a curtain, and the dark soft weeping of her hair and the shadowy light of her eyes, like a wood rayed through with sunset, made it seem yet whiter, as if it were done on purpose. As for the rest, she knew what it was a great deal better than I did; for I never could look far away from her eyes when they were opened upon me.

Now, seeing how I heeded her, and feeling that I had kissed her, although she was such a little girl, eight years old or thereabouts, she turned to the stream in a bashful manner, and began to watch the water, and rubbed one leg against the other.

I, for my part, being vexed at her behavior to me, took up all my things to go, and made a fuss about it—to let her know I was going. But she did not call me back at all, as I had made sure she would do; moreover, I knew that to try the descent was almost certain death to me, and it looked as dark as pitch; and so at the mouth I turned round again, and came back to her, and said, "Lorna."

"Oh, I thought you were gone," she answered; "why did you ever come here? Do you know what they would do to us, if they found you here with me?"

"Beat us, I dare say, very hard, or me at least. They could never beat you."

"No. They would kill us both outright, and bury us here by the water; and the water often tells me that I must come to that."

"But what should they kill me for?"

"Because you have found the way up here, and they never could believe it. Now, please to go; oh, please to go. They will kill us both in a moment. Yes, I like you very much"—for I was teasing her to say it—"very much, indeed, and I will call you John Ridd, if you like; only please to go, John. And when your feet are well, you know, you can come and tell me how they are."

"But I tell you, Lorna, I like you very much, indeed, nearly

as much as Annie, and a great deal more than Lizzie. And I never saw any one like you; and I must come back again tomorrow, and so must you, to see me; and I will bring you such lots of things—there are apples still, and a thrush I caught with only one leg broken, and our dog has just had puppies—"

"Oh, dear, they won't let me have a dog. There is not a dog in the valley. They say they are such noisy things—"

"Only put your hand in mine—what little things they are, Lorna!—and I will bring you the loveliest dog; I will show you just how long he is."

"Hush!" A shout came down the valley; and all my heart was trembling, like water after sunset, and Lorna's face was altered from pleasant play to terror. She shrank to me, and looked up at me with such a power of weakness that I at once made up my mind to save her or to die with her. A tingle went through all my bones, and I only longed for my carbine. The little girl took courage from me, and put her cheek quite close to mine.

"Come with me down the waterfall. I can carry you easily; and mother will take care of you."

"No, no," she cried, as I took her up; "I will tell you what to do. They are only looking for me. You see that hole, that hole there?"

She pointed to a little niche in the rock which verged the meadow, about fifty yards way from us. In the fading of the twilight I could just descry it.

"Yes, I see it; but they will see me crossing the grass to get there."

"Look! look!" She could hardly speak. "There is a way out from the top of it; they would kill me if I told it. Oh, here they come, I can see them."

The little maid turned as white as the snow which hung on the rocks above her, and she looked at the water and then at me, and she cried, "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" And then she began to sob aloud, being so young and unready. But I drew her behind the withy bushes, and close down to the water, where it was quiet and shelving deep, ere it came to the lip of the chasm. Here they could not see either of us from the upper valley, and might have sought a long time for us, even when they came quite near, if the trees

had been clad with their summer clothes. Luckily I had picked up my fish and taken my three-pronged fork away.

Crouching in that hollow nest, as children get together in ever so little compass, I saw a dozen fierce men come down, on the other side of the water, not bearing any firearms, but looking lax and jovial, as if they were come from riding and a dinner taken hungrily. "Queen, queen!" they were shouting, here and there, and now and then, "Where the pest is our little queen gone?"

"They always call me 'queen', and I am to be queen by and by," Lorna whispered to me, with her soft cheek on my rough one, and her little heart beating against me. "Oh, they are crossing by the timber there, and then they are sure to see us."

"Stop," said I; "now I see what to do. I must get into the water, and you must go to sleep."

"To be sure, yes, away in the meadow there. But how bitter cold it will be for you!"

She saw in a moment the way to do it, sooner than I could tell her; and there was no time to lose.

"Now mind you never come again," she whispered over her shoulder, as she crept away with a childish twist, hiding her white front from me; "only I shall come sometimes—oh, here they are!"

Daring scarce to peep, I crept into the water, and lay down bodily in it, with my head between two blocks of stone, and some flood-drift combing over me. The dusk was deepening between the hills, and a white mist lay on the river; but I being in the channel of it, could see every ripple and twig and rush and glazing of twilight above it, as bright as in a picture; so that to my ignorance there seemed no chance at all but what the men must find me. For all this time they were shouting, and swearing, and keeping such a hullabaloo that the rocks all round the valley rang, and my heart quaked, so what with this and the cold, the water began to gurgle round me, and to lap upon the pebbles.

Neither in truth did I try to stop it, being now so desperate, between the fear and the wretchedness; till I caught a glimpse of the little maid, whose beauty and whose kindliness had made me yearn to be with her. And then I knew that for her sake I was bound to be brave and hide myself. She was lying beneath a rock,

thirty or forty yards from me, feigning to be fast asleep, with her dress spread beautifully, and her hair drawn over her.

Presently one of the great rough men came round a corner upon her; and there he stopped and gazed awhile at her fairness and her innocence. Then he caught her up in his arms, and kissed her so that I heard him; and if I had only brought my gun, I would have tried to shoot him.

"Here our queen is! Here's the queen, here's the captain's daughter!" he shouted to his comrades; "fast asleep, and hearty! Now I have first claim to her; and no one else shall touch the child. Back to the bottle, all of you!"

He set her dainty little form upon his great square shoulder, and her narrow feet in one broad hand; and so in triumph marched away, with the purple velvet of her skirt ruffling in his long black beard, and the silken length of her hair fetched out, like a cloud by the wind, behind her. This way of her going vexed me so, that I leaped upright in the water, and must have been spied by some of them, but for their haste. Of their little queen they took small notice, being in this urgency; although they had thought to find her drowned.

Going up that darkened glen, little Lorna, riding still the largest and most fierce of them, turned and put up a hand to me, and I put up a hand to her, in the thick of the mist and the willows.

She was gone, my little dear; and when I got over my fright, I longed to have more to say to her. Her voice to me was so different from all I had ever heard before, as might be a sweet silver bell intoned to the small chords of a harp. But I had no time to think about this, if I hoped to have any supper.

But while I was hugging myself like this, with a boyish manner of reasoning, my joy was like to have ended in sad grief both to myself and my mother, and haply to all honest folk who shall love to read this history. For hearing a noise in front of me, and like a coward not knowing where, but afraid to turn round or think of it, I felt myself going down some deep passage into a pit of darkness. It was no good to catch the sides, the whole thing seemed to go with me. Then, without knowing how, I was leaning over a night of water.

This water was of black radiance, as are certain diamonds, spanned across with vaults of rock, and carrying no image, neither showing marge nor end, but centered with a bottomless indrawal.

With that chill and dread upon me, and the sheer rock all around, and the faint light heaving wavily on the silence of this gulf, I must have lost my wits and gone to the bottom, if there were any.

But suddenly a robin sang, as they will do after dark, towards spring, in the brown fern and ivy behind me. I took it for our little Annie's voice, for she could call any robin, and gathering quick warm comfort, sprang up the steep way towards the starlight. Climbing back, as the stones glid down, I heard the cold greedy wave go lapping, like a blind black dog, into the distance of arches and hollow depths of darkness.

How I found my way home through the Bagworthy forest, is more than I can remember now, for I took all the rest of it then as a dream.

I deserved a good beating that night, after making such a fool of myself, and grinding good fustian to pieces. But when I got home all the supper was in, and the men sitting at the white table, and mother and Annie and Lizzie near by, all eager, and offering to begin, except, indeed, my mother, who was looking out of the doorway, and by the fire was Betty Muxworthy, scolding, and cooking, and tasting her work, all in a breath. I looked through the door from the dark by the wood stack, and was half a mind to stay out like a dog, for fear of the rating and reckoning; but the way my dear mother was looking about, and the browning of the sausages, got the better of me.

But nobody could get out of me where I had been all the day and evening.

CHAPTER VI

A BRAVE RESCUE AND A ROUGH RIDE

IT happened upon a November evening when I was about fifteen years old, and outgrowing my strength very rapidly, my sister Annie being turned thirteen, that the ducks in the court made a terrible quacking, instead of marching off to their pen, one behind another. Thereupon Annie and I ran out to see what might be the sense of it. There were thirteen ducks, ten lily-white and three brown-striped ones; and, without being nice about their color, they all quacked very movingly. They pushed their gold-colored bills here and there, yet dirty, as gold is apt to be, and they jumped on the triangles of their feet, and sounded out of their nostrils; and some of the over-excited ones ran along low on the ground, quacking grievously, with their bills snapping and bending, and the roof of their mouths exhibited.

Annie began to cry, "Dilly, dilly, einy, einy, ducksey," according to the burden of a tune they seem to have accepted as the national ducks' anthem; but instead of being soothed by it, they only quacked three times as hard, and ran round till we were giddy. And they shook their tails all together, and looked grave, and went round and round again. I knew at once, by the way they were carrying on, that there must be something or other gone wholly amiss in the duck world. Sister Annie perceived it, too, but with a greater quickness; for she counted them, like a good duck wife, and could only tell thirteen of them, when she knew there ought to be fourteen.

And so we began to search about, and the ducks ran to lead us aright, having come that far to fetch us; and when we got down to the foot of the courtyard, where the two great ash trees stand by the side of the little water, we found good reason for the urgence and melancholy of the duck birds. Lo! the old white drake, the father of all, a bird of high manners and chivalry, always the last

to help himself from the pan of barley meal, and the first to show fight to a dog or cat intruding upon his family, this fine fellow was now in a sad predicament, yet quacking very stoutly. For the brook, wherewith he had been familiar from his childhood, and wherein he was wont to quest for tadpoles and caddice worms and other game, this brook, which afforded him very often scanty space to dabble in, and sometimes starved the cresses, was now coming down in a great brown flood, as if the banks never belonged to it.

There is always a hurdle, six feet long and four and a half in depth, swung by a chain at either end from an oak laid across the channel. And the use of this hurdle is to keep our kine, at milking time, from straying away there, drinking, for, in truth, they are very dainty, and to fence strange cattle from coming along the bed of the brook, unknown, to steal our substance. But now this hurdle, which hung in the summer a foot about the trickle, would have been dipped more than two feet deep but for the power against it. For the torrent came down so vehemently that the chains at full stretch were creaking, and the hurdle, buffeted almost flat, was going see-saw with a sulky splash on the dirty red comb of the waters. But saddest to see was our venerable mallard between two bars, jammed in by the joint of his shoulder, speaking aloud as he rose and fell, with his topknot full of water, with his tail washed far away from him, being ducked very harshly, against his will, by the fall-to of the hurdle.

Annie was crying and wringing her hands, and I was about to rush into the water, although I liked not the look of it, but hoped to hold on by the hurdle, when a man on horseback came suddenly round the corner of the great ash hedge on the other side of the stream, and his horse's feet were in the water.

"Ho, there!" he cried, "get thee back, boy. The flood will carry thee down like a straw. I will do it for thee and no trouble."

With that he leaned forward, and spoke to his mare—she was just of the tint of a strawberry, a young thing, very beautiful—and she arched up her neck, as misliking the job; yet, trusting him, would attempt it. She entered the flood, with her dainty forelegs sloped farther and farther in front of her, and her delicate ears pricked forward, and the size of her great eyes increasing; but he

kept her straight in the turbid rush by the pressure of his knee on her. Then she looked back, and wondered at him, as the force of the torrent grew stronger, but he bade her go on; and on she went, and it foamed up over her shoulders; and she tossed up her lip and scorned it, for now her courage was waking.

Then, as the rush of it swept her away, and she struck with her forefeet down the stream, he leaned from his saddle in a manner which I never could have thought possible, and caught up old Tom with his left hand, and set him between his holsters, and smiled at his faint quack of gratitude. In a moment all three were carried down stream, and the rider lay flat on his horse, and tossed the hurdle clear from him, and made for the bend of smooth water.

They landed, some thirty or forty yards lower, in the midst of our kitchen garden, where the winter cabbage was; but though Annie and I crept in through the hedge, and were full of our thanks, and admiring him, he would answer us never a word, until he had spoken in full to the mare, as if explaining the whole to her.

"Sweetheart, I know thou couldst have leaped it," he said, as he patted her cheek, being on the ground by this time, and she was nudging up to him, with the water pattering off from her; "but I had good reason, Winnie dear, for making thee go through it."

She answered him kindly with her soft eyes, and sniffed at him very lovingly, and they understood one another. Then he took from his waistcoat two peppercorns, and made the old drake swallow them, and tried him softly upon his legs, where the leading gap in the hedge was. Old Tom stood up quite bravely, and clapped his wings, and shook off the wet from his tail feathers; and then away into the courtyard, and his family gathered around him, and they all made a noise in their throats, and stood up, and put their bills together in thanks for this great deliverance.

Having taken all this trouble, and watched the end of that adventure, the gentleman turned round to us with a pleasant smile on his face, as if he were lightly amused with himself; and we came up and looked at him. He was rather short, about John Fry's height, or maybe a little taller, but very strongly built and springy, as his gait at every step showed plainly, although his legs were bowed with much riding, and he looked as if he lived on horseback.

To a boy like me he seemed very old, being over twenty, and well-found in beard; but he was not more than four-and-twenty, fresh and ruddy-looking, with a short nose and keen blue eyes, and a merry, waggish jerk about him, as if the world were not in earnest. Yet he had a sharp, stern way, like the crack of a pistol, if anything misliked him; and we knew, for children see such things, that it was safer to tickle than buffet him.

"Well, young uns, what be gaping at?" He gave pretty Annie a chuck on the chin, and took me all in without winking.

"Your mare," said I, standing stoutly up, being a tall boy now; "I never saw such a beauty, sir. Will you let me have a ride of her?"

"Think thou couldst ride her, lad? She will have no burden but mine. Thou couldst never ride her. Tut! I would be loath to kill thee."

"Ride her!" I cried, with the bravest scorn, for she looked so kind and gentle; "there never was horse upon Exmoor foaled but I could tackle in half an hour. Only I never ride upon saddle. Take them leathers off of her."

He looked at me with a dry little whistle, and thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, and so grinned that I could not stand it. And Annie laid hold of me in such a way that I was almost mad with her. And he laughed, and approved her for doing so. And the worst of all was, he said nothing.

"Get away, Annie, will you? Do you think I'm a fool, good sir? Only trust me with her, and I will not override her."

"For that I will go bail, my son. She is liker to override thee. But the ground is soft to fall upon, after all this rain. Now come out into the yard, young man, for the sake of your mother's cabbages. And the mellow straw bed will be softer for thee, since pride must have its fall. I am thy mother's cousin, boy, and am going up to house. Tom Faggus is my name, as everybody knows; and this is my young mare, Winnie."

What a fool I must have been not to know it at once! Tom Faggus, the great highwayman, and his young blood mare, the strawberry! Already her fame was noised abroad nearly as much as her master's, and my longing to ride her grew tenfold, but fear

came at the back of it. Not that I had the smallest fear of what the mare could do to me, by fair play and horse trickery, but that the glory of sitting upon her seemed to be too great for me; especially as there were rumors abroad that she was not a mare, but a witch.

But Mr. Faggus gave his mare a wink, and she walked demurely after him, a bright young thing, flowing over with life.

"Up for it still, boy, be ye?" Tom Faggus stopped, and the mare stopped there; and they looked at me provokingly.

"Is she able to leap, sir? There is good take-off on this side of the brook."

Mr. Faggus laughed very quietly, turning round to Winnie, so that she might enter into it. And she, for her part, seemed to know exactly where the fun lay.

"Good tumble-off, you mean, my boy. Well, there can be small harm to thee. I am akin to thy family, and know the substance of their skulls."

"Let me get up," said I, waxing wroth, "take off your saddle bag things. I will try not to squeeze her ribs in, unless she plays nonsense with me."

Then Mr. Faggus was up on his mettle at this proud speech of mine; and John Fry was running up all the while, and Bill Dadds, and half a dozen. Tom Faggus gave one glance around, and then dropped all regard for me. The high repute of his mare was at stake, and what was my life compared to it? Through my defiance and stupid ways, here was I in a duello, and my legs not come to their strength yet, and my arms as limp as a herring.

Something of this occurred to him, even in his wrath with me, for he spoke very softly to the filly, who now could scarce subdue herself; but she drew in her nostrils, and breathed to his breath, and did all she could to answer him.

"Not too hard, my dear," he said; "let him gently down on the mixen. That will be quite enough." Then he turned the saddle off, and I was up in a moment. She began at first so easily, and pricked her ears so lovingly, and minced about as if pleased to find so light a weight upon her, that I thought she knew I could ride a little, and feared to show any capers. "Gee wugg, Polly!" cried I,

for all the men were now looking on, being then at the leaving-off time; "Gee wugg, Polly, and show what thou be'est made of." With that I plugged my heels into her, and Billy Dadds flung his hat up.

Nevertheless, she outraged not, though her eyes were frightening Annie, and John Fry took a pick to keep him safe; but she curbed too and fro with her strong forearms rising like springs ingathered, waiting and quivering grievously, and beginning to sweat about it. Then her master gave a shrill, clear whistle, when her ears were bent towards him, and I felt her form beneath me gathering up like whalebone, and her hind legs coming under her, and I knew that I was in for it.

First she reared upright in the air, and struck me full on the nose with her comb, till I bled worse than Robin Snell made me; and then down with her fore feet deep in the straw, and her hind feet going to heaven. Finding me stick to her still like wax, for my mettle was up as her's was, away she flew with me swifter than I ever went before or since, I trow. She drove full head at the cob wall—"Oh, Jack, slip off!" screamed Annie—then she turned like light, when I thought to crush her, and ground my left knee against it.

Then she took the courtyard gate at a leap, and then right over a quickset hedge, as if the sky were a breath to her; and away for the water meadows, while I lay on her neck like a child and wished I had never been born. Straight away, all in the front of the wind, and scattering clouds around her. All I knew of the speed we made was the frightful flash of her shoulders, and her mane like trees in a tempest. I felt the earth under us rushing away, and the air left far behind us, and my breath came and went, and I prayed and was sorry to be so late of it.

All the long swift while, without power of thought, I clung to her crest and shoulders, and dug my nails into her creases, and my toes into her flank part, and was proud of holding on so long, though sure of being beaten. Then, in her fury at feeling me still, she rushed at another device for it, and leaped the wide water trough sideways across, to and fro, till no breath was left in me. The hazel boughs took me too hard in the face, and the tall dog briers got hold of me, and the ache of my back was like crimping

a fish; till I longed to give it up, thoroughly beaten, and lie there and die in the cresses.

But there came a shrill whistle from up the home hill, where the people had hurried to watch us, and the mare stopped as if with a bullet; then set off for home with the speed of a swallow, and going as smoothly and silently. I never had dreamed of such delicate motion, fluent and graceful and ambient, soft as the breeze flitting over the flowers, but swift as the summer lightning. I sat up again, but my strength was all spent, and no time left to recover it, and though she rose at our gate like a bird, I tumbled off into the mixen.

CHAPTER VII

A MAN JUSTLY POPULAR

AND now, Tom Faggus, be off, if you please, and think yourself lucky to go so; and if ever that horse comes into our yard, I'll ham-string him myself, if none of my cowards dare do it."

Everybody looked at mother, to hear her talk like that, knowing how quiet she was day by day. Winnie, too, was looking at her, being pointed at so much, and wondering if she had done amiss. And then she came to me, and trembled, and stooped her head, and asked my pardon, if she had been too proud with me.

"Winnie shall stop here tonight," said I, for Tom Faggus still said never a word all the while, but began to buckle his things on. "Mother, I tell you, Winnie shall stop; else I will go away with her. I never knew what it was, till now, to ride a horse worth riding."

"Young man," said Tom Faggus, still preparing sternly to depart, "you know more about a horse than any man on Exmoor. Your mother may well be proud of you, but she need have had no fear. As if I, Tom Faggus, your father's cousin—and the only thing I am proud of—would ever have let you mount my mare, which dukes and princes have vainly sought, except for the courage in your eyes, and the look of your father about you. I knew you could ride when I saw you, and rarely you have conquered. Good-bye, John; I am proud of you, and I hoped to have done you pleasure. And, indeed, I came full of some courtly tales, that would have made your hair stand up. But, though not a crust I have tasted since this time yesterday, having given my meat to a widow, I will go and starve on the moor far sooner than eat the best supper that ever was cooked in a place that has forgotten me." With that he fetched a heavy sigh, as if it had been for my father, and feebly got upon Winnie's back, and she came to say farewell to me. He lifted his hat to my mother, with a glance of sorrow, but never a

word; and to me he said, "Open the gate, Cousin John, if you please. You have beaten her so that she cannot leap it, poor thing."

But, before he was truly gone out of our yard my mother came softly after him, with her afternoon apron across her eyes, and one hand ready to offer him. Nevertheless, he made as if he had not seen her, though he let his horse go slowly.

"Stop, Cousin Tom," my mother said.

So Tom Faggus stopped to sup that night with us, and took a little of everything, a few oysters first, and then dried salmon, and then ham and eggs, done in small curled rashers, and then a few collops of venison toasted, and next to that a little cold roast pig, and a woodcock on toast to finish with, before the Scheidam and hot water. And having changed his wet things first, he seemed to be in fair appetite, and praised Annie's cooking mightily, with a kind of noise like a smack of his lips, and a rubbing of his hands together, whenever he could spare them.

Tom Faggus was a jovial soul, if ever there has been one, not making bones of little things, nor caring to seek evil. There was about him such a love of genuine human nature that, if a traveller said a good thing, he would give him back his purse again.

Mother seemed frightened, and whispered to him now and then not to talk of something, because of the children being there; whereupon he always nodded with a sage expression, and applied himself to his food.

"Now let us go and see Winnie, Jack," he said to me after supper; "for the most part I feed her before myself; but she was so hot from the way you drove her. Now she must be grieving for me, and I never let her grieve long."

I was too glad to go with him, and Annie came slyly after us. The filly was walking to and fro on the naked floor of the stable, for he would not let her have any straw until he should make a bed for her, and without so much as a headstall on, for he would not have her fastened. "Do you take my mare for a dog?" he had said, when John Fry brought him a halter. And now she ran to him like a child, and her eyes shone at the lanthorn.

"Hit me, Jack, and see what she will do. I will not let her hurt thee." He was rubbing her ears all the time he spoke, and

she was leaning against him. Then I made believe to strike him, and in a moment she caught me by the waistband, and lifted me clean from the ground, and was casting me down to trample upon me, when he stopped her suddenly.

"What think you of that, boy? Have you horse or dog that would do that for you? Ay, and more than that she will do. If I were to whistle, by and by, in the tone that tells my danger, she would break the stable door down, and rush into the room to me. Nothing will keep her from me then, stone wall or church tower. Ah, Winnie, Winnie, you little witch, we shall die together."

Then he turned away with a joke, and began to feed her nicely, for she was very dainty. Not a husk of oat would she touch that had been under the breath of another horse, however hungry she might be. And with her oats he mixed some powder, fetching it from his saddle bags. What this was I could not guess, neither would he tell me, but laughed, and called it "star-shavings." He watched her eat every morsel of it, with two or three drinks of pure water, ministered between whiles; and then he made her bed in a form I had never seen before, and so we said "good-night" to her.

By trade Tom Faggus had been a blacksmith, in the town of Northmolton, in Devonshire, a rough, rude place at the end of Exmoor; so that many people marvelled if such a man was bred there. Not only could he read and write, but he had solid substance; a piece of land worth a hundred pounds, and right of common for two hundred sheep, and a score and a half of beasts, lifting up or lying down. And being left an orphan with all these cares upon him he began to work right early, and made such a fame at the shoeing of horses that the farriers of Barum were like to lose their custom. And, indeed, he won a golden Jacobus for the best-shod nag in the north of Devon, and some say that he never was forgiven.

But whether it were that or not, he fell into bitter trouble within a month of his victory. This was the beginning of a lawsuit with Sir Robert Bampfylde, a gentleman of the neighborhood, who tried to oust him from his common, and drove his cattle and harassed them. And by that suit of law poor Tom was ruined

Tom Faggus stopped to sup that night with us.

—*Page 43*

altogether, for Sir Robert could pay for much swearing; and then all his goods and his farm were sold up, and even his smithery taken.

All this was very sore upon Tom; and he took it to heart so grievously that he said, "The world hath preyed on me like a wolf. I shall now prey on the world."

He studied his business by night and by day, with three horses all in hard work, until he had made a fine reputation; and then it was competent to him to rest, and he had plenty left for charity. And I ought to say, for society, too, for he truly loved high society, treating squire and nobleman, who much affected his company, to the very best fare of the hostel. And they say that one of the king's justiciaries, being upon circuit, accepted his invitation, declaring merrily that if never true bill had been found against him, mine host should now be qualified to draw one. And so the landlords did; and he always paid them handsomely, so that all of them were kind to him, and contended for his visits.

One of his earliest meetings was with Sir Robert Bampfylde himself, who was riding along the Barum road with only one servingman after him. Tom Faggus put a pistol to his head, being then obliged to be violent, through want of reputation; while the servingman pretended to be a long way round the corner. Then the baronet pulled out his purse, quite trembling in the hurry of his politeness. Tom took the purse, and his ring, and timepiece, and then handed them back with a very low bow, saying that it was against all usage for him to rob a robber. Then he turned to the unfaithful knave, and trounced him right well for his cowardice, and stripped him of all his property.

But now Mr. Faggus kept only one horse, lest the government should steal them; and that one was the young mare Winnie. How he came by her he never would tell, but I think that she was presented to him by a certain colonel, a lover of sport, and very clever in horseflesh, whose life Tom had saved from some gamblers. When I have added that Faggus as yet had never been guilty of bloodshed and that he never robbed a poor man but was very good to the Church, and of hot patriotic opinions, and full of jest and jollity, I have said as much as is fair for him, and shown why he

was so popular. Everybody cursed the Doones, who lived apart disdainfully. But all good people liked Mr. Faggus—when he had not robbed them—and many a poor sick man or woman blessed him for other people's money; and all the hostlers, stable boys and tapsters entirely worshipped him.

He came again about three months afterwards, in the beginning of the springtime, and brought me a beautiful new carbine, having learned my love of such things, and my great desire to shoot straight. But mother would not let me have the gun, until he averred upon his honor that he had bought it honestly.

And so he had, no doubt, so far as it is honest to buy with money acquired rampantly. Scarce could I stop to make my bullets in the mould which came along with it, but must be off to the Quarry hill, and new target I had made there. And he taught me then how to ride bright Winnie, who was grown since I had seen her, but remembered me most kindly.

CHAPTER VIII

MASTER HUCKABACK COMES IN

NOW I feel that of those boyish days I have little more to tell because everything went quietly, as the world for the most part does with us. I began to work at the farm in earnest, and tried to help my mother, and when I remembered Lorna Doone, it seemed no more than the thought of a dream, which I could hardly call to mind. I grew four inches longer in every year of my farming, and a matter of two inches wider; until there was no man of my size to be seen elsewhere upon Exmoor. And Annie was now a fine, fair girl, beautiful to behold. I could look at her by the fireside for an hour together, when I was not too sleepy, and think of my dear father. And she would do the same thing by me. Her hair was done up in a knot behind, but some would fall over her shoulders; and the dancing of the light was sweet to see through a man's eyelashes. There never was a face that showed the light or the shadow of feeling, as if the heart were sun to it, more than our dear Annie's did.

That winter, when I was twenty-one, it had been settled that we should expect Mr. Reuben Huckaback on the last day of December. Mr. Reuben Huckaback, whom many good folk in Dulverton will remember long after my time, was my mother's uncle. He owned the very best shop in that town, and did a fine trade in soft ware. And we being now his only kindred, except, indeed, his granddaughter, little Ruth Huckaback, of whom no one took any heed, mother beheld it a Christian duty to keep as well as could be with him, both for love of a nice old man and for the sake of her children.

Now it pleased God that Christmas time to send safe home to Dulverton, and, what was more, with their loads quite safe, a goodly string of pack horses. Nearly half of their charge was for Uncle Reuben, and he knew how to make the most of it. Then, having balanced his debits and credits, he saddled his horse and rode off

towards Oare, with a good stout coat upon him, and leaving Ruth and his headman plenty to do and little to eat until they should see him again.

We had put off our dinner till one o'clock, and there was to be a brave supper at six of the clock upon New Year's eve; and the singers to come with their lanthorns, and do it outside the parlor window.

Now, when I came in, before one o'clock, after seeing to the cattle—for the day was thicker than ever, and we must keep the cattle close at home if we wished to see any more of them—I fully expected to find Uncle Ben sitting in the fireplace, lifting one cover and then another, as his favorite manner was, and making sweet mouths over them; for he loved our bacon rarely, and they had no good leeks at Dulverton; and he was a man who always would see his cooking done himself. But there, instead of my finding him, with his quaint dry face pulled out at me, and then shut up sharp, not to be cheated, who should run out but mother.

"Oh, Johnny, Johnny," she cried, "I am so glad you are come at last. There is something sadly amiss, Johnny."

"Well, mother, what is the matter, then?"

"What would you say if the people there"—she never would call them "Doones"—"had gotten your poor Uncle Reuben, horse, and Sunday coat, and all?"

"Why, mother, I should be sorry for them. He would set up a shop by the river side, and come away with all their money."

"That all you have to say, John? And my dinner done to a very turn, and the supper all fit to go down, and no worry, only to eat, and be done with it! And all the new plates come from Watchett, with the Watchett blue upon them, at the risk of the lives of everybody, and the recipe from good Aunt Jane for stuffing a curlew with onion before he begins to get cold and make a woodcock of him, and the way to turn the flap over in the inside of a roasting pig—"

"Well, mother dear, I am very sorry. But, let us have our dinner. You know we promised not to wait for him after one o'clock; and you only make us hungry. Everything will be spoiled, mother, and what a pity to think of! After that I will go to seek

for him in the thick of the fog, like a needle in a hay band."

So we made a very good dinner, indeed, though wishing that he could have some of it, and wondering how much to leave for him; and then, as no sound of his horse had been heard, I set out with my gun to look for him.

I followed the track on the side of the hill, from the farmyard, where the sled marks are.

I kept on the track, trudging very stoutly, for nigh upon three miles, and my beard, now beginning to grow at some length, was full of great drops and prickly, whereat I was very proud. I had not so much as a dog with me, and the place was lonesome, and the rolling clouds very desolate; and if a wild sheep ran across, he was scared at me as an enemy.

But my carbine was loaded and freshly primed, and I knew myself to be even now a match in strength for any two men of the size around our neighborhood. "Girt Jan Ridd" I was called already, and folk grew feared to wrestle with me; though I was tired of hearing about it, and often longed to be smaller. And most of all upon Sundays, when I had to make way up our little church, and the maidens tittered at me.

The soft white mist came thicker around me as the evening fell, and the peat ricks here and there and the furze hucks of the summertime were all out of shape in the twist of it. By and by I began to doubt where I was, or how come there, not having seen a gibbet lately; and then I heard the draught of the wind up a hollow place with rocks to it; and for the first time fear broke out like cold sweat upon me.

For the moment I stood like a root, without either hand or foot to help me, and the hair of my head began to crawl, lifting my hat, as a snail lifts his house, and my heart, like a shuttle, went to and fro. But, finding no harm to come, neither visible form approaching, I wiped my forehead, and hoped for the best, and resolved to run every step of the way, till I drew our own latch behind me.

But no sooner was I come to the crossways by the black pool in the hole, but I heard a rough, low sound as of a hobbled sheep a-coughing. I listened, and feared, and yet listened again, though I wanted not to hear it. And the noise was coming nearer. A

dry, short, wheezing sound it was, barred with coughs and want of breath; but this I made the meaning of it:

"Lord have mercy upon me! O Lord, upon my soul have mercy! An' if I cheated Sam Hicks last week, Lord knowest how well he deserved it, and lied in every stocking's mouth—oh, Lord, where be I a-going?"

These words, with many jogs between them, came to me through the darkness, and then a long groan and a choking. I made towards the sound and presently was met point blank by the head of a mountain pony. Upon its back lay a man bound down, with his feet on the neck and his head to the tail, and his arms falling down like stirrups. The wild little nag was scared of its life by the unaccustomed burden, and had been tossing and rolling hard, in desire to get ease of it.

Before the little horse could turn I caught him, jaded as he was, by his wet and grizzled forelock, and he saw that it was vain to struggle, but strove to bite me none the less, until I smote him upon the nose.

"Good and worthy sir," I said to the man who was riding so roughly, "fear nothing; no harm shall come to thee."

"Help, good friend, whoever thou art," he gasped, but could not look at me, because his neck was jerked so. "God hath sent thee, and not to rob me, because it is done already."

"What, Uncle Ben!" I cried, letting go the horse in amazement that the sight of this richest man in Dulverton—"Uncle Ben here in this plight! What, Mr. Reuben Huckaback!"

"An honest hosier and draper, serge and long cloth warehouseman"—he groaned from rib to rib—"at the sign of the Gartered Kitten, in the loyal town of Dulverton. For God's sake, let me down, good fellow, from this accursed marrow bone; and a groat of good money will I pay thee, safe in my house to Dulverton; but, take notice that the horse is mine, no less than the nag they robbed from me."

"What, Uncle Ben, dost thou not know me, thy dutiful nephew, John Ridd?"

I cut the thongs that bound him, and set him astride on the little horse; but he was too weak to stay so. Therefore, I mounted

him on my back, and leading the pony by the cords which I fastened around his nose, set out for home.

Uncle Ben went fast asleep on my back, being jaded and shaken beyond his strength, for a man of threescore-and-five.

As soon as ever I brought him in, we set him up in the chimney corner, comfortable and handsome; and it was no little delight to me to get him off my back; for, like his own fortune, Uncle Ben was of a good round figure. He gave his long coat a shake or two, and he stamped about in the kitchen until he was sure of his whereabouts, and then he fell asleep again until supper should be ready.

My mother made a dreadful stir, of course, about Uncle Ben being in such a plight as this; so I left him to her care and Annie's, and soon they fed him rarely, while I went out to see to the comfort of the captured pony. And, in truth, he was worth the catching, and served us very well afterwards, though Uncle Ben was inclined to claim him for his business at Dulverton, where they have carts and that like. "But," I said, "you shall have him, sir, and welcome, if you will only ride him home as first I found you riding him." And with that he dropped it.

A very strange old man was Mr. Reuben Huckaback, short in his manner, though long of body, glad to do the contrary thing to what any one expected of him, and always looking sharply at people as if he feared to be cheated. This surprised me much at first, because it showed his ignorance of what we farmers are—an upright race, as you may find, scarcely ever cheating, indeed, except upon market day, and even then no more than may be helped by reason of buyers expecting it.

Of course, the Doones and nobody else, had robbed good Uncle Reuben; and then they grew sportive and took his horse, an especially sober nag, and bound the master upon the wild one, for a little change as they told him. For two or three hours they had fine enjoyment chasing him through the fog, and making much sport of his groanings; and then, waxing hungry, they went their way, and left him to opportunity. Now, Mr. Huckaback, growing able to walk in a few days' time, became thereupon impatient, and could not be brought to understand why he should have been robbed at all.

"I have never deserved it," he said to himself "I have never

LIBRARY

deserved it, and will not stand it, in the name of our lord the King, not I!"

On the following day Master Huckaback, with some show of mystery, demanded from my mother an escort into a dangerous part of the world, to which his business compelled him. My mother made answer to this that he was kindly welcome to take our John Fry with him; at which the good clothier laughed, and said that John was nothing like big enough, but another John must serve his turn, not only for his size, but because, if he were carried away, no stone would be left unturned upon Exmoor until he should be brought back again.

Hereupon my mother grew very pale, and found fifty reasons against my going, each of them weightier than the true one, as Eliza, who was jealous of me, managed to whisper to Annie. On the other hand, I was quite resolved to see Uncle Reuben through with it; and it added much to my self-esteem to be the guard of so rich a man. Therefore I soon persuaded mother, with her head upon my breast, to let me go; and after that I was surprised to find that this dangerous enterprise was nothing more than a visit to the Baron de Whichehalse, to lay an information, and sue a warrant against the Doones, and a posse to execute it.

CHAPTER IX

MASTER HUCKABACK FAILS OF WARRANT

WHEN we arrived at Ley Manor we were shown very civilly into the hall. After that we were called to the justice room, where the baron himself was sitting with Colonel Harding, another justiciary of the king's peace, to help him. I had seen the Baron de Whichehalse before, and was not at all afraid of him, having been at school with his son, as he knew, and it made him very kind to me. And, indeed, he was kind to everybody, and all our people spoke well of him.

Hugh de Whichehalse, a white-haired man, of very noble presence, with friendly blue eyes and a sweet, smooth forehead, and aquiline nose, quite beautiful and thin lips curving delicately—this gentleman rose as we entered the room, while Colonel Harding turned on his chair, and struck one spur against the other.

Uncle Reuben made his very best scrape, and then walked up to the table, trying to look as if he did not know himself to be wealthier than both the gentlemen put together. Of course, he was no stranger to them, any more than I was; and, as it proved afterwards, Colonel Harding owed him a lump of money upon very good security. Of him Uncle Reuben took no notice, but addressed himself to De Whichehalse.

The baron smiled very gently so soon as he learned the cause of this visit, and then he replied, quite reasonably:

"A warrant against the Doones, Master Huckaback! Which of the Doones, so please you; and the Christian names, what be they?"

"My lord, I am not their godfather; and most like they never had any. But we all know old Sir Ensor's name, so that may be no obstacle."

"Sir Ensor Doone and his sons—so be it. How many sons, Master Huckaback, and what is the name of each one?"

"How can I tell you, my lord, even if I had known them all as well as my own shop boys? Nevertheless, there were seven of them, and that should be no obstacle."

"A warrant against Sir Ensor Doone and seven sons of Sir Ensor Doone, Christian names unknown, and doubted if they have any. So far so good, Master Huckaback. I have it all down in writing. Sir Ensor himself was there, of course, as you have given in evidence—"

"No, no, my lord, I never said that; I never said—"

"If he can prove that he was not there, you may be indicted for perjury. But as for those seven sons of his, of course you can swear that they were his sons, and not his nephews or grandchildren, or even no Doones at all?"

"My lord, I can swear that they were Doones. It could be nobody else. Because, in spite of the fog—"

"Fog!" cried Colonel Harding, sharply.

"Fog!" said the baron, with emphasis. "Ah, that explains the whole affair. To be sure, now I remember, the weather has been too thick for a man to see the head of his own horse. The Doones could never have come abroad. Master Huckaback, for your own sake, I am heartily glad that this charge has miscarried. I thoroughly understand it now. The fog explains the whole of it."

"Go back, my good fellow," said Colonel Harding; "and, if the day is clear enough, you will find all your things where you left them. I know, from my own experience, what it is to be caught in an Exmoor fog."

Uncle Reuben, by this time, was so put out that he hardly knew what he was saying.

"My lord, Sir Colonel, is this your justice? If I go to London myself for it, the king shall know how a man may be robbed, and the justices prove that he ought to be hanged at the back of it; that in his good shire of Somerset—"

"Your pardon a moment, good sir," De Whichehalse interrupted him; "but I was about to mention what need be an obstacle, and, I fear, would prove a fatal one, even if satisfactory proof were afforded of a felony. The malfeasance was laid in Somerset; but we, two humble servants of his majesty, are in commission of his

peace for the county of Devon only, and therefore could never deal with it."

"And why," cried Uncle Reuben, now carried at last fairly beyond himself, "why could you not say as much at first, and save me all this waste of time and worry of my temper? Gentlemen, you are all in league; all of you stick together. You think it fair sport for an honest trader who makes no sham, as you do, to be robbed and well-nigh murdered, so long as they who did it own the high birthright of felony. If a poor sheep-stealer, to save his children from dying of starvation, had dared to look at a two-month lamb, he would swing on the Manor gallows, and all of you cry 'Good riddance!' But now, because good birth and bad manners—"

Here poor Uncle Ben, not being so strong as before the Doones had played with him, began to foam at the mouth a little, and his tongue went into the hollow where his short gray whiskers were.

I forget how we came out of it, only I was greatly shocked at bearding of the gentry so. All through the homeward road, Uncle Ben was very silent, feeling much displeased with himself, and still more so with other people. But before he went to bed that night he said to me: "Nephew Jack, you have not behaved so badly as the rest to me. And because you have no gift of talking, I think that I may trust you. Now, mark my words, this villain job shall not have ending here. I have another card to play. I have been in this lonely hole far longer than I intended, by reason of this outrage; yet I will stay here one day more upon a certain condition."

"Upon what condition, Uncle Ben?"

"My condition is this, Jack—that you shall guide me tomorrow, without a word to any one, to a place where I may well descry the dwelling of these scoundrel Doones, and learn the best way to get at them, when the time shall come. Can you do this for me? I will pay you well, boy."

I promised very readily to do my best to serve him, but of course would take no money for it, not being so poor as that came to. Accordingly, on the day following, I managed to set the men at work on the other side of the farm, and then, with Uncle Reuben

mounted on my ancient Peggy, I made foot for the westward, directly after breakfast. Uncle Ben refused to go unless I would take a loaded gun, and, indeed, it was always wise to do so in those days of turbulence.

Soon we were come to Bagworthy forest, the blackest and loneliest place of all that keep the sun out. Even now, in winter time, with most of the wood unriddled, and the rest of it pinched brown, it hung around us like a cloak, containing little comfort. I kept quite close to Peggy's head, and Peggy kept quite close to me, and pricked her ears at everything. However, we saw nothing there, except a few old owls and hawks and a magpie sitting all alone, until we came to the bank of the hill, where the pony could not climb it. Uncle Ben was very loath to get off, because the pony seemed company, and he thought he could gallop away on her, if the worst came to the worst; but I persuaded him that now he must go to the end of it. Therefore we made Peggy fast, in a place where we could find her, and speaking cheerfully as if there was nothing to be afraid of, he took his staff and I my gun to climb the thick ascent.

At last we gained the top, with no more trees between us and the brink of the cliff below, three hundred yards below it might be, all strong slope and gliddery. And now for the first time I was amazed at the appearance of the Doones' stronghold, and understood its nature. For when I had been even in the valley and had climbed the cliffs to escape from it about seven years agone, I was no more than a stripling boy, noting little, as boys do, except for their present purpose, and even that soon done with.

Uncle Reuben looked down into Glen Doone and sniffed as if he were smelling it, like a sample of goods from a wholesale house; and then he looked at the hills over yonder, and then he stared at me.

"See what a pack of fools they be! See how this great Doone valley may be taken in half an hour?"

"Yes, to be sure I do, uncle; if they like to give it up, I mean."

"Three culverins on yonder hill, and three on the top of this one, and we have them under a pestle. Ah, I have seen the wars,

my lad, from Keinton up to Naseby; and I might have been a general now, if they had taken my advice—"

But I was not attending to him, being drawn away on a sudden by a sight which never struck the sharp eyes of our general. For I had long ago descried that little opening in the cliff through which I made my exit, as before related, on the other side of the valley. No bigger than a rabbit hole it seemed from where we stood; and yet of all the scene before me, that had the most attraction. Now, gazing at it with full thought of all that it had cost me, I saw a little figure come and pause and pass into it. Something very light and white, nimble, smooth and elegant, gone almost before I knew that any one had been there. And yet my heart came to my ribs; and all my blood was in my face, and pride within me fought with shame, and vanity with self-contempt; for though seven years were gone, and I from my boyhood come to manhood, and all must have forgotten me, and I had half forgotten; at that moment, once for all, I felt that I was face to face with fate, weal or woe, in Lorna Doone.

CHAPTER X

JOHN IS CLEARLY BEWITCHED

MASTER REUBEN HUCKABACK being gone, as he went next day to his favorite town of Dulverton, my spirit began to burn and pant for something to go on with; and nothing showed a braver hope of movement and adventure than a lonely visit to Glen Doone by way of the perilous passage discovered in my boyhood. Therefore, I waited for nothing more than the slow arrival of new small clothes, made by a good tailor at Porlock, for I was wishful to look my best; and when they were come and approved, I started regardless of the expense, and forgetting how badly they would take the water.

I chose a seven-foot staff of ash and fixed a loach fork in it, to look as I had looked before; and leaving word upon matters of business, out of the back door I went, on Saint Valentine's Day, and so through the little orchard and down the brawling Lynn brook.

While I was letting my thoughts go wild to sounds and sights of nature, a sweeter note than thrush or ouzel ever wooed a mate in floated on the valley breeze at the quiet turn of sundown. The words were of an ancient song, fit to cry or laugh at:

"Love, an if there be one,
Come my love to be,
My love is for the one
Loving unto me.

"Not for me the show, love,
Of a gilded bliss;
Only thou must know, love,
What my value is.

"If in all the earth, love,
Thou hast none but me,
This shall be my worth, love,
To be cheap to thee.

"But, if so thou ever
Strivest to be free,
'Twill be my endeavor
To be dear to thee."

All this I took in with great eagerness, not for the sake of the meaning, which is no doubt an allegory, but for the power and

By the side of the stream Lorna was coming to me.

Page 59

richness and softness of the singing, which seemed to me better than we ever had even in Oare church. But all the time I kept myself in a black niche of the rock, where the fall of the water began, lest the sweet singer should be alarmed, and flee away. But presently I ventured to look forth where a bush was; and then I beheld the loveliest sight—one glimpse of which was enough to make me kneel in the coldest water.

By the side of the stream she was coming to me, even among the primroses, as if she loved them all; and every flower looked the brighter as her eyes were on them. I could not see what her face was, my heart so awoke and trembled; only that her hair was flowing from a wreath of white violets, and the grace of her coming was like the appearance of the first wind flower. The pale gleam over the western cliffs threw a shadow of light behind her, as if the sun were lingering. Never do I see that light from the closing of the west, even in these my aged days, without thinking of her. Ah, me! if it comes to that, what do I see of earth or heaven, without thinking of her?

The tremulous thrill of her song was hanging on her open lips; and she glanced around, as if the birds were accustomed to make answer. To me it was a thing of terror to behold such beauty, and feel myself the while to be so very low and common. But scarcely knowing what I did, I came from the dark mouth of the chasm, and stood, afraid to look at her.

She was turning to fly, not knowing me and frightened, perhaps, at my stature, when I dropped on the grass as I fell before her seven years agone that day, and I just said, "Lorna Doone!"

She knew me at once, from my manner and ways, and a smile broke through her trembling as sunshine comes through aspen leaves; and being so clever, she saw, of course, that she needed not to fear me.

"Oh, indeed," she cried, with a feint of anger, because she had shown her cowardice, and yet in her heart she was laughing; "oh, if you please, who are you, sir, and how do you know my name?"

"I am John Ridd," I answered; "the boy who gave you those beautiful fish when you were only a little girl, seven years ago today."

"Yes, the poor boy who was frightened so, and obliged to hide here in the water."

"And do you remember how kind you were and saved my life by your quickness and went away riding upon a great man's shoulder, as if you had never seen me, and yet looked back through the willow trees?"

"Oh, yes, I remember everything; because it was so rare to see any except—I mean, because I happen to remember. But you seem not to remember, sir, how perilous this place is."

For she had kept her eyes upon me; large eyes, of a softness, a brightness, and a dignity which made me feel as if I must forever love and yet forever know myself unworthy.

"I think, Master Ridd, you cannot know," she went on with her eyes taken from me, "what the dangers of this place are and the nature of the people."

She was trembling from real fear of violence, lest strong hands might be laid on me, and a miserable end of it. And, to tell the truth, I grew afraid; perhaps from a kind of sympathy, and because I knew that evil comes more readily than good to us.

Therefore it struck me that I had better go, and have no more to say to her until next time of coming.

"Mistress Lorna, I will depart"—I thought that a powerful word—"in fear of causing disquiet. If any rogue shot me, it would grieve you—I make bold to say it—and it would be the death of mother. Few mothers have such a son as me. Try to think of me now and then, and I will bring you some new-laid eggs, for our young blue hen is beginning."

"I thank you heartily," said Lorna; "but you need not come to see me. You can put them in my little bower, where I am almost always—I mean, whither daily I repair to read and to be away from them."

"Only show me where it is. Thrice a day I will come and stop—"

"Nay, Master Ridd, I would never show thee—never, because of peril—only that so happens it thou hast found the way already."

And she smiled with a light that made me care to cry out for no other way, except to her dear heart. So I touched her white

hand softly when she gave it to me, and fancying that she had sighed was touched at heart about it, and resolved to yield her all my goods, although my mother was living; and then grew angry with myself for a mile or more of walking, to think she would condescend so. For the rest of the homeward road I was mad with every man in the world who would dare to think of having her.

Now the wisest person in all our parts was reckoned to be a certain wise woman, well known all over Exmoor by the name of "Mother Melldrum." Her real name was "Maple Durham," as I learned long afterwards; and she came of an ancient family, but neither of Devon nor Somerset. Nevertheless she was quite at home with our proper modes of divination; and knowing that we liked them best—as each man does his own religion—she would always practice them for the people of the country.

Mother Melldrum had two houses, or, rather, she had none at all, but two homes wherein to find her, according to the time of year. In summer she lived in a pleasant cave, facing the cool side of the hill, far inland near Hawkbridge. But throughout the winter she found sea air agreeable.

Therefore, at the fall of the leaf, when the woods grew damp and irksome, the wise woman always set her face to the warmer cliffs of the Channel where shelter was, and dry fern bedding, and folk to be seen in the distance from a bank upon which the sun shone. And there, as I knew from our John Fry who had been to her about rheumatism, and sheep possessed with an evil spirit, and warts on the hand of his son, young John, any one who chose might find her, towards the close of a winter day, gathering sticks and brown fern for fuel, and talking to herself the while, in a hollow stretch behind the cliffs; which foreigners, who come and go without seeing much of Exmoor, have called the "Valley of Rocks." Although well nigh the end of March, and the wind wild and piercing, I went here on foot a Sunday afternoon to ask Mother Melldrum when I might again visit Lorna.

When she was come so nigh to me that I could descry her features, there was something in her countenance that made me not dislike her. She looked as if she had been visited by many troubles, and had felt them one by one, yet held enough of kindly

nature still to grieve for others. Long white hair on either side was falling down below her chin, and through her wrinkles clear bright eyes seemed to spread themselves upon me.

"Thou art not come to me," she said, looking through my simple face as if it were but glass, "to be struck for bone-shave, nor to be blessed for barn-gun. Give me forth thy hand, John Ridd, and tell why thou art come to me."

I was so much amazed at her knowing my name and all about me, that I feared to place my hand in her power, or even my tongue by speaking. Being so ashamed and bashful, I was half inclined to tell her a lie, and then I knew that I could not.

"I am come to know," I said, looking at a rock the while, to keep my voice from shaking, "when I may go to see Lorna Doone."

"John Ridd," said the woman, "of whom art thou speaking? Is it a child of the man who slew your father?"

"I cannot tell, mother. How should I know? And what is that to thee?"

"It is something to thy mother, John; and something to thyself, I trow; and nothing worse could befall thee."

I waited for her to speak again, because she had spoken so sadly that it took my breath away.

"John Ridd, if thou hast any value for thy body or thy soul, thy mother, or thy father's name, have nought to do with any Doone."

She gazed at me in earnest so, and raised her voice in saying it, until the whole valley, curving like a great bell, echoed "Doone," that it seemed to me my heart was gone for every one and everything.

Although I left at once, having little heart for further questions of the wise woman, and being afraid to visit her house under the "Devil's Cheese-ring," to which she kindly invited me, and, although I ran part of the way, it was very late for farmhouse time upon a Sunday evening before I was back at Plover's Barrows. My mother had great desire to know all about the matter, but I could not reconcile it with my respect so to frighten her. Therefore, I tried to sleep it off, keeping my own counsel; and when

Lorna told me about everything that I wished to know.

that proved of no avail, I strove to work it away, if might be, by heavy outdoor labor and weariness and good feeding.

But when the weather changed in earnest, and the frost was gone, and the lambs were at play with the daisies, it was more than I could do to keep from thought of Lorna.

The upshot of it all was this, that as no Lorna came to me, except in dreams or fancy, and as my life was not worth living without constant sign of her, forth I must again to find her. And suddenly, on the edge of the Doone-glade, there she stood.

"Master Ridd, are you mad?" she said. "Come away, come away, if you care for life. The patrol will be here directly. Be quick, Master Ridd, let me hide thee."

"I will not stir a step," said I, though being in the greatest fright that might be well imagined, "unless you call me 'John.'"

"Well, John, then—Master John Ridd; be quick, if you have any to care for you."

Without another word she led me, though with many timid glances towards the upper valley, to, and into, her little bower, where the inlet through the rock was. Inside the niche of native stone, the plainest thing of all to see, at any rate by daylight, was the stairway hewn from rock and leading up the mountain, by means of which I had escaped, as before related. To the right side of this was the mouth of the pit, still looking very formidable though Lorna laughed at my fear of it, for she drew her water thence. But on the left was a narrow crevice, very difficult to espy, and having a sweep of gray ivy laid, like a slouching beaver, over it. A man here, coming from the brightness of the outer air, with eyes dazed by the twilight, would never think of seeing this and following it to its meaning.

Lorna raised the screen for me, but I had much ado to pass, on account of bulk and stature. Instead of being proud of my size, as it seemed to me she ought to be, Lorna laughed so quietly that I was ready to knock my head or elbows against anything, and say no more about it. However, I got through at last without a word of compliment, and broke into the pleasant room, the lone retreat of Lorna.

The chamber was of unhewn rock, round, as near as might be,

eighteen or twenty feet across, and gay with rich variety of fern and moss lichen. The fern was in its winter still, or coiling for the springtide; but moss was in abundant life, some feathering, and some gobleted, and some with fringe of red to it. Overhead there was no ceiling but the sky itself, flaked with little clouds of April wandering softly over it. The floor was made of soft, low grass, mixed with moss and primroses; and in a niche of shelter moved the delicate wood sorrel. Here and there, around the sides, were chairs of living stone.

While I was gazing at all these things with wonder, Lorna turned upon me lightly and said:

"Where are the new-laid eggs, Master Ridd?"

"Here be some," I answered. "I would have brought thee twice as many, but that I feared to crush them in the narrow ways, Mistress Lorna."

And so I laid her out two dozen upon the moss of the rock ledge, unwinding the wisp of hay from each as it came safe out of my pocket. Lorna looked with growing wonder as I added one to one; and when I had placed them side by side, and bidden her now to tell them, to my amazement, what did she do but burst into a flood of tears!

"What have I done?" I asked, with shame, scarce daring even to look at her, because her grief was not like Annie's—a thing that could be coaxed away, and left a joy in going—"oh, what have I done to vex you so?"

"It is nothing done by you, Master Ridd," she answered, very proudly, as if nought I did could matter; "it is only something that comes upon me with the scent of the pure, true clover hay. Moreover, you have been too kind, and I am not used to kindness."

Then, sitting over against me, now raising and now dropping fringe over those sweet eyes that were the road lights of her tongue, Lorna told me all about everything that I wished to know.

CHAPTER XI

LORNA TELLS HER STORY

I HAVE no remembrance now of father or of mother; although they say that my father was the eldest son of Sir Ensor Doone, and the bravest and the best of them. And so they call me heiress to this little realm of violence; and in sorry sport, sometimes, I am their princess or their queen.

"Many people living here, as I am forced to do, would perhaps be very happy, and perhaps I ought to be so. We have a beauteous valley, sheltered from the cold of winter and the power of the summer sun.

"But what I want to know is something none of them can tell me—what am I, and why set here. All around me are violence and robbery, coarse delight and savage pain, reckless joke and hopeless death. There is none to lead me forward, there is none to teach me right; young as I am, I live beneath a curse that lasts forever."

Here Lorne broke down for a while, and cried so very piteously, that, doubting of my knowledge and of any power to comfort, I did my best to hold my peace, and tried to look very cheerful. Then, thinking that might be bad manners, I went to wipe her eyes for her. And so she went on again.

"We should not be so quiet here, and safe from interruption, but that I have begged that the lower end, just this narrowing of the valley, where it is most hard to come at, might be looked upon as mine, except for purposes of guard. Therefore none besides the sentries ever trespass on me here, unless it be my grandfather, or the Counsellor, or Carver.

"By your face, Master Ridd, I see that you have heard of Carver Doone. For strength and courage and resource he bears the first repute among us, as might well be expected from the son of the Counsellor. But he differs from his father in being very hot and savage, and quite free from argument. The Counsellor, who is my uncle, gives his son the best advice; commending all the virtues with eloquence and wisdom, yet himself abstaining from them.

"Among the robbers there is none whose safe return I watch for—I mean none more than other—and, indeed, there seems no risk, all are now so feared of us. Not one of the old men is there whom I can revere or love except alone my grandfather, whom I love with trembling; neither of the women any whom I like to deal with, unless it be a little maiden whom I saved from starving.

"A little Cornish girl she is, and shaped in western manner, not so very much less in width than if you take her lengthwise. Her father seems to have been a miner, a Cornishman of more than average excellence, and yet he left his daughter to starve upon a peat-rick. His name was Simon Carfax, and he came as the captain of a gang from one of the Cornish tanneries. Gwenny Carfax, my young maid, well remembers how her father was brought up from Cornwall. Her mother had been buried just a week or so before, and he was sad about it and had been off his work and was ready for another job. Then people came to him by night and said that he must want a change, that everybody lost their wives, and work was the way to mend it. So what with grief and overthought and the inside of a square bottle, Gwenny says they brought him off, to become a mighty captain, and choose the country around. The last she saw of him was this, that he went down a ladder somewhere on the wilds of Exmoor, leaving her with bread and cheese and his travelling hat to see to. And from that day to this he never came above the ground again, so far as we can hear of.

"But Gwenny, holding to his hat, and having eaten the bread and cheese when he came no more to help her, dwelt three days near the mouth of the hole; and then it was closed over, the while that she was sleeping. With weakness and with want of food she lost herself distressfully, and went away for miles or more, and lay upon a peat-rick to die before the ravens.

"That very day I chanced to return from my Aunt Sabina's dying-place; for she would not die in Glen Doone, she said, lest the angels feared to come for her; and so she was taken to a cottage in a lonely valley. Returning very sorrowful, and caring now for nothing, I found this little stray thing lying, with her arms upon her, and not a sign of life, except the way that she was biting. Black root-stuff was in her mouth, and a piece of dirty sheep's

LORNA AND SIR ENSOR DOONE

"Not one of the old men is there whom I can revere except my grandfather."

wool, and at her feet an old egg-shell of some bird of the moorland.

"I tried to raise her, but she was too square and heavy for me; and so I put food in her mouth, and left her to do right with it. And this she did in a little time; for the victuals were very choice and rare, being what I had taken over to tempt poor Aunt Sabina. Gwenny ate them without delay, and then was ready to eat the basket and the ware that had contained them.

"Gwenny took me for an angel, though I am little like one, as you see, Master Ridd; and she followed me, expecting that I would open wings and fly when we came to any difficulty. I brought her home with me, so far as this can be a home; and she made herself my sole attendant, without so much as asking me.

"Now, I would tell you of one evening last summer when a horrible thing befell, which took all play of childhood from me. The fifteenth day of last July was very hot and sultry long after the time of sundown and I was paying heed to it, because of the old saying that if it rain then, rain will fall on forty days thereafter. I had been long by the waterside at this lower end of the valley, plaiting a little crown of woodbine crocketed with sprigs of heath to please my grandfather, who likes to see me gay at supper time. Being proud of my tiara, which had cost some trouble, I set it on my head at once to save the chance of crushing, and carrying my gray hat, ventured by a path not often trod. For I must be home at the supper time, or grandfather would be exceedingly wroth and the worst of his anger is that he never condescends to show it.

"Therefore, instead of the open mead, or the windings of the river, I made short-cut through the ash trees covert, which lies in the middle of our vale, with the water skirting or cleaving it. You have never been up so far as that—at least, to the best of my knowledge—but you see it like a long gray spot from the top of the cliffs above us. Here I was not likely to meet any of our people, because the young ones are afraid of some ancient tale about it, and the old ones have no love of trees where gunshots are uncertain.

"It was more almost than dusk, down below the tree leaves, and I was eager to go through and be again beyond it. I hastened shyly, ready to draw back and run from hare, or rabbit, or small field mouse.

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"At a sudden turn of the narrow path, where it stooped again to the river, a man leaped out from behind a tree and stopped me and seized hold of me. I tried to shriek, but my voice was still and I could only hear my heart.

"'Now, Cousin Lorna, my good cousin,' he said, with ease and calmness; 'your voice is very sweet, no doubt, from all that I can see of you. But I pray you keep it still, unless you would give to dusty death your very best cousin and trusty guardian, Alan Brandir of Loch Awe.'

"'You my guardian!' I said, for the idea was too ludicrous; and ludicrous things always strike me first, through some fault of nature.

"'I have in truth that honor, madam,' he answered, with a sweeping bow; 'unless I err in taking you for Mistress Lorna Doone.'

"'You have not mistaken me. My name is Lorna Doone.'

"'Then I am your faithful guardian, Alan Brandir of Lock Awe; called Lord Alan Brandir, son of a worthy peer of Scotland. Now will you confide in me?'

"'I confide in you!' I cried, looking at him with amazement; 'why, you are not older than I am!'

"'Yes, I am, three years at least. You, my ward, are not sixteen. I, your worshipful guardian, am almost nineteen years of age.'

"Upon hearing this I looked at him, for that seemed then a venerable age; but the more I looked the more I doubted, although he was dressed quite like a man. He led me in a courtly manner, stepping at his tallest to an open place beside the water, where the light came in.

"'Now, am I to your liking, cousin?' he asked, when I had gazed at him until I was almost ashamed.

"For in my usage among men of stature and strong presence, this pretty youth, so tricked and slender, seemed nothing but a doll to me. Although he scared me in the wood, now that I saw him in good twilight, lo! he was but little greater than my little self; and so tasselled and so ruffled with a mint of bravery, and a green coat barred with red, and a slim sword hanging under him, it was the utmost I could do to look at him half gravely.

"'Hush!' I said, at last; 'talk not so loudly.'

"For he was quite forgetting now, in his bravery before me, where he stood, and with whom he spoke, and how the summer lightning shone above the hills and down the hollow. And as I gazed on this slight, fair youth, clearly one of high birth and breeding, a chill of fear crept over me because he had no strength or substance, and would be no more than a pin cushion before the great swords of the Doones.

"'I pray you be not vexed with me,' he answered, in a softer voice; 'for I have travelled far and sorely for the sake of seeing you. I know right well among whom I am, and that their hospitality is more of the knife than the salt-stand. Nevertheless I am safe enough, for my foot is the fleetest in Scotland, and what are these hills to me?'

"'Worshipful guardian,' I said, 'if thou art in no haste, I am, and cannot stay here idling. Only tell me how I am akin and under wardship to thee, and what purpose brings thee here.'

"'In order, cousin—all things in order, even with fair ladies. First, I am thy uncle's son, my father is thy mother's brother, or at least thy grandmother's—unless I am deceived in that which I have guessed—and no other man. For my father, being a leading lord in the councils of King Charles the Second, appointed me to learn the law. But of law I learned, as you may suppose, but little, although I have capacities. The thing was far too dull for me. All I care for is adventure, moving chance, and hot encounter; therefore all of law I learned was how to live without it. Nevertheless, for amusement's sake, as I must needs be at my desk an hour or so in the afternoon, I took to the sporting branch of the law, the pitfalls, and the ambuscades; and of all the traps to be laid therein, pedigrees are the rarest. There is scarce a man worth a cross of butter, but what you may find a hole in his shield within four generations. And so I struck our own escutcheon, and it sounded hollow. There is a point—but heed not that; enough that being curious now, I followed up the quarry, and I am come to this at last —we, even we, the lords of Loch Awe, have an outlaw for our cousin; and I would we had more, if they be like you.'

"'Sir,' I answered, being amused by his manner, which was

new to me, for the Doones are much in earnest, 'surely you count it no disgrace to be of kin to Sir Ensor Doone, and all his honest family?'

"'If it be so, it is in truth the very highest honor, and would heal ten holes in our escutcheon. What noble family but springs from a captain among robbers? Trade alone can spoil our blood; robbery purifies it. The robbery of one age is the chivalry of the next. We may start anew, and vie with even the nobility of France, if we can once enroll but half the Doones upon our lineage.'

"'I like not to hear you speak of the Doones as if they were no more than that,' I exclaimed, being now unreasonable; 'but will you tell me, once for all, sir, how you are my guardian?'

"'That I will do. You are my ward because you were my father's ward, under the Scottish law; and now my father being so deaf, I have succeeded to that right—at least in my own opinion—under which claim I am here, to neglect my trust no longer, but to lead you away from the scenes and deeds which are not the best for young gentlewomen. There, spoke I not like a guardian? After that can you mistrust me?'

"'But,' said I, 'good Cousin Alan, it is not meet for young gentlewomen to go away with young gentlemen, though fifty times their guardians. But if you will only come with me, and explain your tale to my grandfather, he will listen to you quietly, and take no advantage of you.'

"'I thank you much, kind Mistress Lorna, to lead the goose into the fox's den! But, setting by all thought of danger, I have other reasons against it. Now, come with your faithful guardian, child. I will pledge my honor against all harm, and to bear you safe to London. Come, and in a few months' time you shall set the mode at court, instead of pining here, and weaving coronals of daisies.'

"I turned aside and thought a little. Although he seemed so light of mind and gay in dress and manner, I could not doubt his honesty and saw, beneath his jaunty air, true mettle and ripe bravery. But now the storm was rising, and I began to grow afraid, for of all things awful to me thunder is the dreadfulest. It doth so growl, like a lion coming, and then so roll and roar and

rumble out of a thickening darkness, then crack like the last trump overhead, through cloven air and terror that all my heart lies low and quivers like a weed in water. I listened now for the distant rolling of the great storm, and heard it and was hurried by it.

" 'I cannot go, I will not go with you, Lord Alan Brandir,' I answered, at last. I may not leave my grandfather without his full permission. I thank you much for coming, sir; but be gone at once by the way you came; and pray how did you come, sir?'

" 'Down the cliffs I came, and up them I must make way back again. Now adieu, fair Cousin Lorna, I see you are in haste to-night; but I am right proud of my guardianship. Give me just one flower for a token'—here he kissed his hand to me, and I threw him a truss of woodbine—'adieu, fair cousin, trust me well, I will soon be here again.'

" 'That thou never shalt, sir,' cried a voice as loud as a culverin; and Carver Doone had Alan Brandir as a spider hath a fly. The boy made a little shriek at first, with the sudden shock and the terror; then he looked, methought, ashamed of himself, and set his face to fight for it. Very bravely he strove and struggled to free one arm and to grasp his sword; but as well might an infant buried alive attempt to lift his gravestone. Carver Doone, with his great arms wrapped around the slim, gay body, smiled at the poor young face turned up to him; then he lifted the youth from his feet, and bore him away into the darkness.

"I was young then. I am older now; older by ten years, in thought, although it is not a twelvemonth since. If that black deed were done again, I could follow and could combat it, could throw weak arms on the murderer, and strive to be murdered also. I am now at home with violence, and no dark death surprises me.

"But, being as I was that night, the horror overcame me. The crash of thunder overhead, the last despairing look, the deathpiece framed with blaze of lightning—my young heart was so affrighted that I could not gasp. My breath went from me, and I knew not where I was, or who, or what. Only that I lay, and cowered, under great trees full of thunder; and could neither count, nor moan, nor have my feet to help me.

"Yet hearkening, as a coward does, through the brushing of the wind and echo of far noises, I heard a sharp sound as of iron, and a fall of heavy wood. No unmanly shriek came with it, neither cry for mercy. Carver Doone knows what it was, and so did Alan Brandir."

CHAPTER XII

A ROYAL INVITATION

AFTER hearing that tale from Lorna I went home in sorry spirits, having added fear for her to all my other ailments. And was it not quite certain now, she being owned full cousin to a peer and lord of Scotland, although he was a dead one, must have nought to do with me, a yeoman's son.

Moreover, I was greatly vexed with my own hesitation, stupidity, or shyness, or whatever else it was, which had held me back from saying, ere she told her story, what was in my heart to say, that I must die unless she let me love her.

But the worst of all was this, that in my great dismay and anguish to see Lorna weeping so, I had promised not to cause her any further trouble from anxiety and fear of harm. And this, being brought to practice, meant that I was not to show myself within the precincts of Glen Doone for at least another month. Unless, indeed, as I contrived to edge into the agreement, anything should happen to increase her present trouble and every day's uneasiness. In that case she was to throw a dark mantle, or covering of some sort, over a large white stone which hung within the entrance to her retreat—I mean the outer entrance—and which, though unseen from the valley itself, was conspicuous from the height where I stood with Uncle Reuben.

One afternoon, when work was over, I had seen to the horses, and just as I was saying to myself that in five days more my month would be done and myself free to seek Lorna, a man came riding up from the ford where the road goes through the Lynn stream. As soon as I saw that it was not Tom Faggus, I went no farther to meet him, counting that it must be some traveller bound for Brendon or Cheriton, and likely enough he would come and beg for a draught of milk or cider and then on again, after asking the way.

But instead of that, he stopped at our gate, and stood up from his saddle, and holloed as if he were somebody; and all the time he was flourishing a white thing in the air, like the bands our parson weareth. So I crossed the courtyard to speak with him.

"Service of the King!" he saith; "service of our Lord the King! Come hither, thou great yokel, at risk of fine and imprisonment."

Although not pleased with this, I went to him, as became a loyal man; quite at my leisure, however.

"Plover Barrows farm!" said he; "is there anywhere in this cursed county a cursed place called 'Plover Barrows farm'? For the last twenty mile at least they told me 'twere only half a mile farther, or only just round corner. Now tell me that, and I fain would thwack thee, if thou were not thrice my size."

"Sir," I replied, "you shall not have the trouble. This is Plover's Barrows farm, and you are kindly welcome. Sheep's kidneys is for supper, and the ale got bright from the tapping. But why do you think ill of us? We like not to be cursed so."

"Nay, I think no ill," he said; "sheep's kidneys is good, uncommon good, if they do them without burning. But I be so galled in the saddle ten days, and never a comely meal of it. And when they hear 'King's service' cried, they give me the worst of everything. All the way down from London I had a rogue of a fellow in front of me, eating the fat of the land before me, and everyone bowing down to him. He could go three miles to my one, though he never changed his horse. He might have robbed me at any minute, if I had been worth the trouble. A red mare he rideth, strong in the loins, and pointed quite small in the head. I shall live to see him hanged yet."

All this time he was riding across the straw of our courtyard, getting his weary legs out of the leathers, and almost afraid to stand yet. A coarse-grained, hard-faced man he was, some forty years of age or so, and of middle height and stature. He was dressed in a dark brown riding suit, none the better for Exmoor mud, but fitting him very differently from the fashion of our tailors. Across the holsters lay his cloak, made of some red skin, and shining from the sweating of the horse. As I looked down on

"John Ridd, if thou hast any value for thy body or thy soul, have nought to do with any Doone."

—Page 62

his stiff, bright head piece, small, quick eyes, and black, needly beard, he seemed to despise me for a mere ignoramus and country bumpkin.

"Annie, have down the cut ham," I shouted, for sister was come to the door by chance, or because of the sound of a horse in the road, "and cut a few rashes of hung deer's meat. There is a gentleman come to sup, Annie."

"I wish I may go to a place never meant for me," said my new friend, now wiping his mouth with the sleeve of his brown riding coat, "if ever I fell among such good folk. You are the right sort, and no error therein. All this shall go in your favor greatly when I make deposition. At least, I mean if it be as good in the eating as in the hearing. 'Tis a supper quite fit for Tom Faggus himself, the man who hath stolen my victuals so. And that hung deer's meat; now is it of the red deer running wild in these parts?"

"To be sure it is, sir," I answered; "where should we get any other?"

"Right, right; you are right, my son. I have heard that the flavor is marvellous. Some of them came and scared me so in the fog of the morning that I hungered for them ever since. Ha, ha, I saw their haunches. But the young lady will not forget—art sure she will not forget it?"

"You may trust her to forget nothing, sir, that may tempt a guest to his comfort."

"In faith, then, I will leave my horse in your hands, and be off for it. Half the pleasure of the mouth is in the nose beforehand. But stay; almost I forgot my business, in the hurry which thy tongue hath spread through my lately despairing belly. Hungry I am, and sore of body, from my heels right upward, and sorest in front of my doublet; yet may I not rest, nor bite barley bread, until I have seen and touched John Ridd. God grant that he be not far away; I must eat my saddle if it be so."

"Have no fear, good sir," I answered; "you have seen and touched John Ridd. I am he, and not one likely to go beneath a bushel."

"It would take a large bushel to hold thee, John Ridd. In the name of the King, His Majesty Charles the Second, these presents!"

He touched me with the white thing which I had first seen him waving, and which I now beheld to be sheepskin, such as they call parchment. It was tied across with cord, and fastened down in every corner with unsightly dabs of wax. By order of the messenger, for I was overfrightened now to think of doing anything, I broke the seals and there I saw my name in large.

"Read, my son; read, thou great fool, if, indeed, thou canst read," said the officer to encourage me; "there is nothing to kill thee, boy, and my supper will be spoiling. Stare not at me so, thou fool; thou art big enough to eat me; read, read, read."

"If you please, sir, what is your name?" I asked; though why I asked I know not, except from fear of witchcraft.

"Jeremy Stickles is my name, lad, nothing more than a poor apparitor of the worshipful Court of King's Bench. And at this moment a starving one, and no supper for me unless thou wilt read."

Being compelled in this way, I read pretty nigh as follows; not that I give the whole of it, but only the gist and the emphasis:

"To our good subject, John Ridd," etc.—describing me ever so much better than I knew myself—"by these presents, greeting. These are to require thee, in the name of our Lord the King, to appear in person before the Right Worshipful the Justices of His Majesty's Bench at Westminster, laying aside all thine own business, and there to deliver such evidence as is within thy cognizance, touching certain matters whereby the peace of our said Lord the King, and the well-being of this realm, is, are, or otherwise may be impeached, impugned, imperilled, or otherwise detrimented. As witness these presents." And then there were four seals, and then a signature I could not make out, only that it began with a J, and ended with some other writing, done almost in a circle. Underneath was added in a different handwriting, "Charges will be borne. The matter is full urgent."

The messenger watched me while I read so much as I could read of it; and he seemed well pleased with my surprise, because he had expected it. Then, not knowing what else to do, I looked again at the cover, and on the top of it I saw, "Ride, Ride, Ride! On His Gracious Majesty's business; spur and spare not."

It may be supposed by all who know me that I was taken hereupon with such a giddiness in my head and noisiness in my ears that I was forced to hold by the crook driven in below the thatch for holding of the hay rakes. There was scarcely any sense left in me, only that the thing was come by power of Mother Melldrum, because I despised her warning, and had again sought Lorna. But the officer was grieved for me, and the danger to his supper.

"My son, be not afraid," he said; "we are not going to skin thee. Only thou tell all the truth, and it shall be—but never mind, I will tell thee all about it, and how to come out harmless, if I find thy victuals good and no delay in serving them."

"We do our best, sir, without bargain," said I, "to please our visitors."

Now, though my mother was willing that I should go to London, expecting great promotion and high glory for me, I myself was deeply gone into the pit of sorrow. For what would Lorna think of me? Here was the long month just expired, after worlds of waiting; there would be her lovely self, peeping softly down the glen, and fearing to encourage me; yet there would be nobody else, and what an insult to her! Dwelling upon this, and seeing no chance of escape from it, I could not find one wink of sleep; though Jeremy Stickles, who slept close by, snored loud enough to spare me some. For I felt myself to be, as it were, in a place of some importance; in a situation of trust, I may say; and bound not to depart from it. For who could tell what the king might have to say to me about the Doones—and I felt that they were at the bottom of this strange appearance—or what his majesty might think, if, after receiving a message from him, I were to violate his faith in me as a churchwarden's son, and falsely spread his words abroad?

Puzzling on this, I fell asleep after the proper time to get up; nor was I to be seen at breakfast time, and mother was very uneasy about it. But Master Stickles assured her that the king's writ often had that effect, and the symptom was a good one.

"Now, Master Stickles, when must we start?" I asked him, as he lounged in the yard gazing at our turkey poults picking and running in the sun to the tune of their father's gobble. "Your horse was greatly foundered, sir, and is hardly fit for the road to-

day; and Smiler was sledding yesterday all up the higher Cleve, and none of the rest can carry me."

"In a few more years," replied the king's officer, contemplating me with much satisfaction, "'twill be a cruelty to any horse to put thee on his back, John."

Master Stickles, by this time, was quite familiar with us, calling me "Jack," and Eliza "Lizzie," and, what I liked the least of all, our pretty Annie "Nancy."

"That will be as God pleases, sir," I answered him, rather sharply; "and the horse that suffers will not be thine. But I wish to know when we must start upon our long travel to London town. I perceive that the matter is of great despatch and urgency."

"To be sure, so it is, my son. But I see a yearling turkey there; him, I mean, with the hop in his walk, who, if I know aught of fowls, would roast well tomorrow. Thy mother must have preparation; it is no more than reasonable. Now, have that turkey killed tonight and we will have him for dinner tomorrow, with, perhaps, one of his brethren; and a few more collops of red deer's flesh for supper; and then, on the Friday morning, we will set our faces to the road upon his majesty's business."

"Nay, but, good sir," I asked, with some trembling, so eager was I to see Lorna, "if his majesty's business will keep till Friday, may it not keep until Monday? We have a litter of sucking pigs, excellently choice and white, six weeks old come Friday. There be too many for the sow, and one of them needeth roasting. Think you not it would be a pity to leave the women to carve it?"

"My son, Jack," replied Master Stickles, "never was I in such quarters yet. And now I think on it, Friday is not a day upon which pious people love to commence an enterprise. I will choose the young pig tomorrow at noon, at which time they are wont to gambol, and we will celebrate his birthday by carving him on Friday. After that we will gird our loins, and set forth early on Saturday."

Now this was little better to me than if we had set forth at once, Sunday being the very first day upon which it would be honorable for me to enter Glen Doone. But though I tried every possible means with Master Jeremy Stickles, offering him the choice for dinner of every beast that was on the farm, he durst not put

off our departure later than the Saturday. And nothing else but love of us and of our hospitality would have so persuaded him to remain with us till then. Therefore, now my only chance of seeing Lorna before I went lay in watching from the cliff and espying her, or a signal from her.

This, however, I did in vain, until my eyes were weary, and often would delude themselves with hope of what they ached for. But though I lay hidden behind the trees upon the crest of the stony fall, and waited so quiet that the rabbits and squirrels played around me, and even the keen-eyed weasel took me for a trunk of wood, it was all as one; no cast of color changed the white stone, whose whiteness now was hateful to me; nor did wreath or skirt of maiden break the loneliness of the vale.

CHAPTER XIII

A GREAT MAN ATTENDS TO BUSINESS

IT was a long and weary journey to London although the roads are wondrous good on the farther side of Bristowe, and scarcely any man need be bogged, if he keeps his eyes well open, save, perhaps, in Berkshire. In consequence of the pass we had, and the vinters' knowledge of it, we only met two robbers, one of whom made off straightway when he saw my companion's pistols and the stout carbine I bore, and the other came to a parley with us, and proved most kind and affable when he knew himself in the presence of the cousin of Squire Faggus. "God save you, gentlemen," he cried, lifting his hat politely; "many and many a happy day I have worked this road with him. Such times will never be again. But commend me to his love and prayers. King my name is, and king my nature. Say that, and none will harm you." And so he made off down the hill, being a perfect gentleman, and a very good horse he was riding.

The night was falling very thick by the time we were come to Tyburn, and here the king's officer decided that it would be wise to halt; because the way was unsafe by night across the fields to Charing village. I, for my part, was nothing loath and preferred to see London by daylight.

And, after all, it was not worth seeing, but a very hideous and dirty place, not at all like Exmoor. Some of the shops were very fine, and the signs above them finer still, so that I was never weary of standing still to look at them. But in doing this there was no ease; for before one could begin almost to make out the meaning of them, either some of the wayfarers would bustle and scowl and draw their swords, or the owner, or his apprentice boys, would rush out and catch hold of me, crying, "Buy, buy, buy! What d'ye lack, what d'ye lack? Buy, buy, buy!" At first I mistook the meaning of this—for so we pronounce the word "boy" upon Exmoor—and I

answered with some indignation, "Sirrah, I am no boy now, but a man of one-and-twenty years; and as for lacking, I lack nought from thee, except what thou has not—good manners."

The only things that pleased me much were the river Thames, and the hall and church of Westminster, where there are brave things to be seen, and braver still to think about. But whenever I wandered in the streets, what with the noise the people made, the number of the coaches, the running of the footmen, the swaggering of great courtiers, and the thrusting aside of everybody, many and many a time I longed to be back among the sheep again, for fear of losing temper. They were welcome to the wall for me, as I took care to tell them, for I could stand without the wall, which perhaps was more than they could do. Though I said this with the best intention, meaning no discourtesy, some of them were vexed at it; and one young lord, being flushed with drink, drew his sword and made at me. But I struck it up with my holly stick, so that it flew on the roof of a house; then I took him by the belt with one hand, and laid him in the kennel. This caused some little disturbance; but none of the rest saw fit to try how the matter might be with them.

Now, this being the year of our Lord 1683, more than nine years and a half since the death of my father, and the beginning of this history, all London was in a great ferment about the dispute between the Court of the King and the City. The king, or rather, perhaps, his party, for they said that his majesty cared for little except to have plenty of money and spend it, was quite resolved to be supreme in the appointment of the chief officers of the corporation. But the citizens maintained that under their charter this right lay entirely with themselves; upon which a writ was issued against them for forfeiture of their charter; and the question was now being tried in the Court of His Majesty's Bench.

This seemed to occupy all the attention of the judges, and my case was put off from time to time, while the court and the city contended. And so hot was the conflict and hate between them, that a sheriff had been fined by the king, and a former lord mayor had even been sentenced to the pillory, because he would not

swear falsely. Hence the courtiers and the citizens scarce could meet in the streets with patience, or without railing and frequent blows.

But now, as I stayed there, only desirous to be heard and to get away, and scarcely even guessing yet what was wanted of me, for even Jeremy Stickles knew not, or pretended not to know, things came to a dreadful pass between the king and all the people who dared to have an opinion. For about the middle of June the judges gave their sentence that the city of London had forfeited its charter, and that its franchise should be taken into the hands of the king. Scarcely was this judgment forth, and all men hotly talking of it, when a far worse thing befell. News of some great conspiracy was spread at every corner, and that a man in the malting business had tried to take up the brewer's work, and lop the king and the Duke of York. Everybody was shocked at this, for the king himself was not disliked so much as his advisers; but everybody was more than shocked, grieved indeed to the heart with pain, at hearing that Lord William Russell and Mr. Algernon Sidney had been seized and sent to the Tower of London, upon a charge of high treason.

And here I was, now in the second month living at my own charges, in the house of a worthy fur-monger at the sign of the Seal and Squirrel, abutting upon the Strand road which leads from Temple Bar to Charing.

At length, being quite at the end of my money, and seeing no other help for it, I determined to force my way up to the justices, and insist upon being heard by them.

Having seen Lord Russell murdered in the fields of Lincoln's Inn, or, rather, having gone to see it, but turned away with a sickness and a bitter flood of tears—for a whiter and a nobler neck never fell before low beast—I strode away towards Westminster, cured of half my indignation at the death of Charles I. Many people hurried past me, chiefly of the more tender sort, revolting at the butchery. In their ghastly faces, as they turned them back, lest the sight should be coming after them, great sorrow was to be seen, and horror, and pity, and some anger.

In Westminster Hall I found nobody; not even the crowd of

crawling varlets who used to be craving evermore for employment or for payment. I knocked at three doors, one after another, of lobbies going out of it where I had formerly seen some officers and and people pressing in and out; but for my trouble I got nothing, except some thumps from echo. And at last an old man told me that all the lawyers were gone to see the result of their own works in the fields of Lincoln's Inn. However, in a few days' time, I had better fortune; for the court was sitting and full of business to clear off the arrears of work before the lawyers' holiday. The crier of the court came out and wanted to know who I was. I told him, as shortly as I could, that my business lay with his majesty's bench, and was very confidential; upon which he took me inside with warning, and showed me to an underclerk, who showed me to a higher one, and the higher clerk to the head one.

When this gentleman understood all about my business he frowned at me very heavily, as if I had done him an injury.

"John Ridd," he asked me with a stern glance, "is it your deliberate desire to be brought into the presence of the lord chief justice?"

"Surely, sir, it has been my desire for the last two months or more."

"Then, John, thou shalt be. But mind one thing, not a word of thy long detention, or thou mayest get into trouble."

"How, sir? For being detained against my own wish?" I asked him; but he turned away, as if that matter were not worth his arguing—as, indeed, I suppose it was not—and led me through a little passage to a door with a curtain across it.

"Now, if my lord cross-question you," the gentleman whispered to me, "answer him straight out truth at once, for he will have it out of thee. And, mind, he loves not to be contradicted, neither can he bear a hang-dog look. Take little heed of the other two, but note every word of the middle one; and never make him speak twice."

I thanked him for his good advice as he moved the curtain and thrust me in, but instead of entering withdrew, and left me to bear the brunt of it.

The chamber was not very large, though lofty to my eyes, and

dark, with wooden panels round it. At the farther end were some raised seats, such as I have seen in churches, lined with velvet, and having broad elbows, and a canopy over the middle seat. There were only three men sitting here, one in the centre, and one on each side; and all three were done up wonderfully with fur and robes of state and curls of thick gray horsehair, crimped, and gathered, and plaited down to their shoulders. Each man had an oak desk before him, set at a little distance and spread with pens and papers. Instead of writing, however, they seemed to be laughing and talking, or, rather, the one in the middle seemed to be telling some good story, which the others received with approval. By reason of their great perukes it was hard to tell how old they were; but the one who was speaking seemed the youngest, although he was the chief of them. A thick-set, burly and bulky man, with a blotchy, broad face, and great square jaws and fierce eyes full of blazes. He was one to be dreaded by gentle souls, and to be abhorred by the noble.

Between me and the three lord judges some few lawyers were gathering up bags and papers and pens and so forth from a narrow table in the middle of the room, as if a case had been disposed of, and no other were called on. But before I had time to look round twice, the stout, fierce man espied me, and shouted out with a flashing stare:

"How now, countryman, who art thou?"

"May it please your worship," I answered him, loudly, "I am John Ridd, of Oare parish, in the shire of Somerset, brought to this London some two months back by a special messenger, whose name is Jeremy Stickles, and then bound over to be at hand and ready when called upon to give evidence in a matter unknown to me, but touching the peace of our lord the king and the well-being of his subjects. Every day, save Sunday, I have walked up and down the great hall of Westminster, all the business part of the day, expecting to be called upon; yet no one hath called upon me. And now I desire to ask your worship whether I may go home again?"

"Well done, John," replied his lordship, while I was panting with all this speech; "I will go bail for thee, John, thou hast never made such a long speech before; and thou art a spunky Briton,

or thou couldst not have made it now. I remember the matter well; and I myself will attend to it, although it arose before my time"—he was but newly chief justice—"but I cannot take it now, John. There is no fear of losing thee, John, any more than the Tower of London. I grieve for his majesty's exchequer, after keeping thee two months or more."

"Nay, my lord, I crave your pardon. My mother hath been keeping me. Not a groat have I received."

"Spank, is it so?" his lordship cried, in a voice that shook the cobwebs, and the frown on his brow shook the hearts of men, and mine as much as the rest of them. "Spank, is his majesty come to this, that he starves his own approvers?"

"My lord, my lord," whispered Mr. Spank, the chief officer of evidence, "the thing hath been overlooked, my lord, among such grave matters of treason."

"I will overlook thy head, foul Spank, on a spike from Temple Bar, if ever I hear of the like again. Vile varlet, what art thou paid for? Thou hast swindled the money thyself, foul Spank; I know thee, though thou art new to me. Bitter is the day for thee that ever I came across thee. Answer me not—one word more and I will have thee on a hurdle." And he swung himself to and fro on his bench, with both hands on his knees; and every man waited to let it pass, knowing better than to speak to him.

"John Ridd," said the lord chief justice at last, recovering a sort of dignity yet daring Spank from the corners of his eyes to do so much as look at him, "thou hast been shamefully used, John Ridd. Answer me not, boy, not a word; but go to Master Spank, and let me know how he behaves to thee;" here he made a glance at Spank, which was worth at least ten pounds to me; "be thou here again, tomorrow; and before any other case is taken I will see justice done to thee. Now be off, boy; thy name is Ridd and we are well rid of thee."

I was only too glad to go after all this tempest, as you may well suppose. For if ever I saw a man's eyes become two holes for the devil to glare from, I saw it that day; and the eyes were those of the Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys.

Mr. Spank was in the lobby before me, and before I had recov-

ered myself, for I was vexed with my own terror, he came up sidling and fawning to me, with a heavy bag of yellow leather.

"Good Master Ridd, take it all, take it all; and say a good word for me to his lordship. He hath taken a strange fancy to thee; and thou must make the most of it. We never saw man meet him eye to eye so, and yet not contradict him; and that is just what he loveth. Abide in London, Master Ridd, and he will make thy fortune. His joke upon thy name proves that. And I pray you remember, Master Ridd, that the Spanks are sixteen in family."

But I would not take the bag from him, regarding it as a sort of bribe to pay me such a lump of money without so much as asking how great had been my expenses. Therefore I only told him that if he would kindly keep the cash for me until the morrow, I would spend the rest of the day in counting how much it had stood me in board and lodging since Master Stickles had rendered me up; for, until that time, he had borne my expenses. In the morning I would give Mr. Spank a memorandum, duly signed and attested by my landlord, including the breakfast of that day, and, in exchange for this, I would take the exact amount from the yellow bag, and be very thankful for it.

"If that is thy way of using opportunity," said Spank, looking at me with some contempt, "thou wilt never thrive in these times, my lad. Even the lord chief justice can be little help to thee, unless thou knowest better than that how to help thyself."

It mattered not to me. The word "approver" stuck in my gorge, as used by the lord chief justice; for we looked upon an approver as a very low thing, indeed. I would rather pay for every breakfast and even every dinner eaten by me since here I came, than take money as an approver. And, indeed, I was much disappointed at being taken in that light, having understood that I was sent for as a trusty subject and humble friend of his majesty.

In the morning I met Mr. Spank waiting for me at the entrance, and very desirous to see me. I showed him my bill, made out in fair copy, and he laughed at it, and said, "Take it twice over, Master Ridd; once for thine own sake, and once for his majesty's."

"Nay, I will take it but once," I said; "if his majesty loves

to be robbed, he need not lack of his desire while the Spanks are sixteen in family."

The clerk smiled cheerfully at this, being proud of his children's ability; and then, having paid my account, he whispered:

"He is all alone this morning, John, and in rare good humor. He hath been promised the handling of poor Master Algernon Sidney, and he says he will soon make republic of him; for his state shall shortly be headless. He is chuckling over his joke, like a pig with a nut; and that always makes him pleasant. John Ridd, my lord!" With that he swung up the curtain bravely, and, according to special orders, I stood face to face and alone with Judge Jeffreys.

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN IS DRAINED AND CAST ASIDE

HIS LORDSHIP was busy with some letters and did not look up for a minute or two, although he knew that I was there. Meanwhile I stood waiting to make my bow; afraid to begin upon him, and wondering at his great bullhead. Then he closed his letters, well-pleased with their import, and fixed his bold, broad stare on me as if I were an oyster opened, and he would know how fresh I was.

"May it please your worship," I said, "here I am according to order, awaiting your good pleasure.'

"Thou art made to weight, John, more than order," he said. Then all his manner changed, and he looked, with his heavy brows bent upon me as if he had never laughed in his life, and would allow none else to do so.

"I am ready to answer my lord," I said, "if he asks me nought beyond my knowledge, or beyond my honor."

"Hadst better answer me everything, lump. What hast thou to do with honor? Now, is there in thy neighborhood a certain nest of robbers, miscreants, and outlaws, whom all men fear to handle?"

"Yes, my lord. At least, I believe some of them be robbers; and all of them are outlaws."

"And what is your high sheriff about, that he doth not hang them all? Or send them up for me to hang, without more to-do about them?"

"I reckon that he is afraid, my lord; it is not safe to meddle with them. They are of good birth, and reckless; and their place is very strong."

"Good birth! What was Lord Russell of, Lord Essex, and this Sidney? 'Tis the surest heirship to the block to be the chip of an old one. What is the name of this pestilent race, and how many of them are there?"

"They are the Doones of Bagworthy Forest, may it please your worship. And we reckon there be about forty of them, beside the women and children."

"Forty Doones, all forty thieves! And women and children! How long have they been there then?"

"They may have been there thirty years, my lord; and, indeed, they may have been forty. Before the great war broke out they came, longer back than I can remember."

"Ay, long before thou wast born, John. Good, thou speakest plainly. Woe betide a liar, when I get hold of him. Ye want me on the Western Circuit and ye shall have me, when London traitors are spun and swung. There is a family called De Whichehalse living very nigh thee, John?"

This he said in a sudden manner, as if to take me off my guard, and fixed his great thick eyes on me. And in truth I was much astonished.

"Yes, my lord, there is. At least, not so very far from us. Baron de Whichehalse, of Ley Manor."

"Baron, ha! of the Exchequer—eh, lad? And taketh dues instead of his majesty. Somewhat which halts there ought to come a little further, I trow. It shall be seen to, as well as the witch which makes it so to halt. Riotous knaves in West England, drunken outlaws, you shall dance, if ever I play pipe for you. John Ridd, I will come to Oare parish, and rout out the Oare of Babylon."

"Although your worship is so learned," I answered, seeing that now he was beginning to make things uneasy; "your worship, though being chief justice, does little justice to us. We are downright good and loyal folk; and I have not seen, since here I came to this great town of London, any who may better us, or even come anigh us, in honesty and goodness and duty to our neighbors. For we are very quiet folk, not prating our own virtues—"

"Enough, good John, enough! Knowest thou not that modesty is the maidenhood of virtue, lost even by her own approval? Now, hast thou ever heard or thought that De Whichehalse is in league with the Doones of Bagworthy?"

Saying these words rather slowly, he skewered his great eyes into mine so that I could not think at all, neither look at him, nor

get away. The idea was so new to me that it set my wits all wandering; and, looking into me, he saw that I was groping for the truth.

"John Ridd, thine eyes are enough for me. I see thou hast never dreamed of it. Now, hast thou ever seen a man whose name is Thomas Faggus?"

"Yes, sir, many and many a time. He is my own worthy cousin; and I fear that he hath intentions"—here I stopped, having no right there to speak about our Annie.

"Tom Faggus is a good man," he said; and his great square face had a smile which showed me he had met my cousin; "Master Faggus hath made mistakes as to the title to property, as lawyers oftentimes may do; but take him all for all, he is a thoroughly straightforward man; presents his bill and has it paid, and makes no charge for drawing it. Nevertheless, we must tax his costs, as of any other solicitor."

"To be sure, to be sure, my lord!" was all that I could say, not understanding what all this meant.

"I fear he will come to the gallows," said the lord chief justice sinking his voice below the echoes; "tell him this for me, Jack. He shall never be condemned before me; but I cannot be everywhere; and some of our justices may keep short memory of his dinners. Tell him to change his name, turn parson, or do something else to make it wrong to hang him. Now a few more things, John Ridd; and for the present I have done with thee."

All my heart leaped up at this, to get away from London so; and yet I could hardly trust to it.

"Is there any word round your way of disaffection to his majesty, his most gracious majesty?"

"No, my lord; no sign whatever. We pray for him in church perhaps; and we talk about him afterwards, hoping it may do him good, as it is intended. But after that we have nought to say, not knowing much about him—at least, till I get home again."

"That is as it should be, John. And the less you say the better. But I have heard of things in Taunton, and even nearer to you, in Dulverton, and even nigher still, upon Exmoor; things which are of the pillory kind, and even more of the gallows. I see

that you know nought of them. Nevertheless, it will not be long before all England hears of them. Now, John, I have taken a liking to thee; for never man told me the truth, without fear or favor, more thoroughly and truly than thou hast done. Keep thou clear of this, my son. It will come to nothing; yet many shall swing high for it. Even I could not save thee, John Ridd, if thou wert mixed in this affair. Keep from the Doones, keep from De Whichehalse, keep from everything which leads beyond the sight of thy knowledge. I meant to use thee as my tool; but I see thou art too honest and simple. I will send a sharper down; but never let me find thee, John, either a tool for the other side, or a tube for my words to pass through."

Here the lord justice gave me such a glare that I wished myself well rid of him, though thankful for his warnings; and seeing how he had made upon me a long-abiding mark of fear, he smiled again in a jocular manner, and said:

"Now, get the gone, Jack. I shall remember thee; and, I trow, thou wilt'st not for many a day forget me."

But though he had so far dismissed me, I was not yet quite free to go, inasmuch as I had not money enough to take me all the way to Oare, unless, indeed, I should go afoot, and beg my sustenance by the way, which seemed to be below me. Therefore, I got my few clothes packed and my few debts paid, all ready to start in half an hour if only they would give me enough to set out upon the road with. For I doubted not, being young and strong, that I could walk from London to Oare in ten days or in twelve at most, which was not much longer than horsework; only I had been a fool, as you will say when you hear it. For, after receiving from Master Spank the amount of the bill which I had delivered—less, indeed, by fifty shillings than the money my mother had given me, for I had spent fifty shillings, and more, in seeing the town and treating people, which I could not charge to his majesty—I had first paid all my debts thereout, which were not very many, and then supposing myself to be an established creditor of the treasury for my coming needs, and already scenting the country air, and foreseeing the joy of my mother, what had I done but spent half my balance, ay, and more than three quarters of it, upon presents

for mother, and Annie, and Lizzie, and John Fry, and his wife, and Betty Muxworthy.

And if I must, while I am about it, hide nothing from those who read me, I had actually bought for Lorna a thing the price of which quite frightened me, till the shopkeeper said it was nothing at all, and that no young man, with a lady to love him, could dare to offer her rubbish such as the Jew sold across the way.

And, to my great amazement, when I went with another bill for the victuals of only three days more and a week's expense on the homeward road reckoned very narrowly, Master Spank not only refused to grant me any interview, but sent me out a piece of blue paper, looking like a butcher's ticket, and bearing these words and no more, "John Ridd, go to the devil. He who will not when he may, when he will, he shall have nay." From this I concluded that I had lost favor in the sight of Chief Justice Jeffreys. Perhaps because my evidence had not proved of any value; perhaps because he meant to let the matter lie till cast on him.

But at the corner of the street I met my good friend Jeremy Stickles, newly come in search of me. I took him back to my little room—mine, at least, till tomorrow morning—and told him all my story, and how much I felt aggrieved by it. But he surprised me very much by showing no surprise at all.

"It is the way of the world, Jack. They have gotten all they can from thee, and why should they feed thee further? We feed not a dead pig, I trow, but baste him well with brine and rue. Nay, we do not victual him upon the day of killing; which they have done to thee. But five pounds thou shalt have, Jack," said Jeremy Stickles suddenly, "five pounds, and I will take my chance of wringing it from that great rogue Spank. Ten I would have made it, John, but for bad luck lately. Put back your bits of paper, lad; I will have no acknowledgment. John Ridd, no nonsense with me!"

For I was ready to kiss his hand, to think that any man in London should trust me with five pounds without even a receipt for it!

It was the beginning of wheat harvest, when I came to Dunster town, having walked all the way from London, and being somewhat footsore. I had made the way in six days and no more. It

I came to Dunstertown, having walked all the way from London.

—*Page 92*

may be one hundred and seventy miles, I cannot tell to a furlong or two, especially as I lost my way more than a dozen times.

Here I took horse, and how shall I tell you the things I felt, and the swelling of my heart within me, as I drew nearer, and more near to home? The first sheep I beheld on the moor with a great red J. R. on his side, for mother would have them marked with my name, instead of her own, as they should have been, I do assure you made my spirit leap, and all my sight came to my eyes. I shouted out, "Jem, boy!"—for that was his name, and a rare hand he was at fighting—and he knew me in spite of the strange horse; and I leaned over and stroked his head, and swore he should never be mutton. And when I was passed, he set off at full gallop to call all the rest of the J. R.'s together, and tell them young master was come home at last.

But bless your heart, and my own as well, it would take me all the afternoon to lay before you one-tenth of the things which came home to me in that one half-hour, as the sun was sinking in the real way he ought to sink. I touched my horse with no spur nor whip, feeling that my slow wits would go if the sights came too fast over them. Here was the pool where we washed the sheep, and there was the hollow that oozed away where I had shot three wild ducks. Here was the peat rick that hid my dinner when I could not go home for it, and there was the bush with the thyme growing round it, where Annie had found a great swarm of our bees. And now was the corner of the dry stone wall, where the moor gave over in earnest, and the partridges whisked from it into the corn lands, and called that their supper was ready, and looked at our house and the ricks as they ran, and would wait for that comfort till winter.

And there I saw—but let me go—Annie was too much for me. She nearly pulled me off my horse, and kissed the very mouth of my carbine.

"I knew you would come. Oh, John! oh, John! I have waited here every Saturday night; and I saw you for the last mile or more, but I would not come round the corner for fear that I should cry, John; and then not cry when I got you. Now I may cry as much as I like, and you need not try to stop me, John, because I am

so happy. But you mustn't cry yourself, John; what will mother think of you? She will be so jealous of me."

What mother thought I cannot tell; and, indeed, I doubt if she thought at all for more than half an hour, but only managed to hold me tight, and cry, and thank God now and then.

Old Smiler had told them that I was coming—all the rest, I mean, except Annie—for, having escaped from his halter ring, he was come out to graze in the lane a bit; when what should he see but a strange horse coming with young master and mistress upon him, for Annie must needs get up behind me, there being only sheep to look at her? Then Smiler gave us a stare and a neigh, with his tail quite stiff with amazement, and then he flung up his hind feet, and galloped straight home, and set every dog wild with barking.

And happier people could not be found than the whole of us that evening.

CHAPTER XV

JOHN HAS HOPE OF LORNA

I WENT on Monday morning after I came home to the crest of the broken highland, whence I had agreed to watch for Lorna's mark or signal. And sure enough at last I saw, when it was too late to see, that the white stone had been covered over with a cloth or mantle, the sign that something had arisen to make Lorna want me. For a moment I stood amazed at my evil fortune; that I should be too late, in the very thing of all things on which my heart was set! Then, after eying sorrowfully every crack and cranny to be sure that not a single flutter of my love was visible, off I set, with small respect either for my knees or neck, to make the round of the outer cliffs, and come up my old access.

Nothing could stop me; it was not long, although to me it seemed an age, before I stood in the niche of rock at the head of the slippery water course, and gazed into the quiet glen where my foolish heart was dwelling. Notwithstanding doubts of right, notwithstanding sense of duty, and despite all manly striving and the great love of my home, there my heart was ever dwelling, knowing what a fool it was, and content to know it.

Many birds came twittering round me in the gold of August; many trees showed twinkling beauty as the sun went lower, and the lines of water fell from wrinkles into dimples. Little heeding, there I crouched.

At last a little figure came, looking very light and slender in the moving shadows. Who was I to crouch or doubt, or look at her from a distance; what matter if they killed me now, and one tear came to bury me? Therefore I rushed out at once, as if shot guns were unknown yet.

I know not whether Lorna was afraid of what I looked, or what I might say to her, or of her own thoughts of me; all I know is that she looked frightened when I hoped for gladness.

Therefore I went slowly toward her, taken back in my impulse; and said all I could come to say, with some distress in doing it.

"Mistress Lorna, I had hope that you were in need of me."

"Oh, yes; but that was long ago; two months ago, or more, sir." And saying this she looked away, as if it all were over. But I was now so dazed and frightened that it took my breath away, and I could not answer, feeling sure that I was robbed and some one else had won her. And I tried to turn away without another word, and go.

But I could not help one stupid sob, though mad with myself for allowing it, but it came too sharp for pride to stay it, and it told a world of things. Lorna heard it, and ran to me, with her bright eyes full of wonder, pity, and great kindness, as if amazed that I had more than a simple liking for her. Then she held out both hands to me; and I took and looked at them.

"Master Ridd, I did not mean," she whispered, very softly, "I did not mean to vex you."

"If you would be loath to vex me, none else in this world can do it," I answered out of my great love, but fearing yet to look at her, mine eyes not being strong enough.

"Come away from this bright place," she answered, trembling in her turn; "I am watched and spied of late. Come beneath the shadows, John."

She stole across the silent grass; but I strode hotly after her; fear was all beyond me now, except the fear of losing her. I could not but behold her manner, as she went before me, all her grace, and lovely sweetness, and her sense of what she was.

She led me to her own rich bower, and if in spring it were a sight, what was it in summer glory? But although my mind had notice of its fairness and its wonder, not a heed my heart took of it, neither dwelt it in my presence more than flowing water. All that in my heart was felt, was the maiden moving gently, and afraid to look at me.

For now the power of my love was abiding on her, new to her, unknown to her; not a thing to speak about, nor even to think clearly; only just to feel and wonder, with a pain of sweetness.

She could look at me no more, neither could she look away, with a studied manner—only to let fall her eyes, and blush, and be put out with me, and still more with herself.

I left her quite alone; though close, though tingling to have hold of her. Even her right hand was dropped and lay among the mosses. Neither did I try to steal one glimpse below her eyelids. Life and death were hanging on the first glance I should win; yet I let it be so.

After long or short—I know not, yet ere I was weary, ere I yet began to think or wish for any answer—Lorna slowly raised her eyelids, with a gleam of dew below them, and looked at me doubtfully. Any look with so much in it never met my gaze before.

"Darling, do you love me?" was all that I could say to her.

"Yes, I like you very much," she answered, with her eyes gone from me, and her dark hair falling over so as not to show me things.

"But do you love me, Lorna, Lorna; do you love me more than all the world?"

"No, to be sure not. Now why should I?"

"In truth, I know not why you should. Only I hoped that you did, Lorna. Either love me not at all, or as I love you, forever."

"John, I love you very much; and I would not grieve you. You are the bravest, and kindest, and the simplest of all men—I mean of all people. I like you very much, Master Ridd, and I think of you almost every day."

"That will not do for me, Lorna. Not almost every day I think, but every instant of my life, of you. For you I would give up my home, my love of all the world besides, my duty to my dearest ones; for you I would give up my life. Do you love me so?"

"Not by any means," said Lorna. "No; I like you very much when you do not talk so wildly; and I like to see you come as if you would fill our valley up; and I like to think that even Carver would be nothing in your hands, but as to liking you like that, what should make it likely? especially when I have made the signal, and for some two months or more you have never even answered it! If you like me so ferociously, why do you leave me for other people to do just as they like with me?"

"To do as they liked! Oh, Lorna, not to make you marry Carver?"

"No, Master Ridd, be not frightened so; it makes me fear to look at you."

"But you have not married Carver yet? Say, quick! Why keep me waiting so?"

"Of course I have not, Master Ridd. Should I be here if I had, think you, and allowing you to like me so, and to hold my hand, and make me laugh, as I declare you almost do sometimes? And at other times you frighten me."

"Did they want you to marry Carver? Tell me all the truth of it."

"Not yet, not yet. They are not half so impetuous as you are, John. I am only just seventeen, you know, and who is to think of marrying? But they wanted me to give my word, and be formally betrothed to him in the presence of my grandfather. It seems that something frightened them. There is a youth named Charleworth Doone—everyone calls him 'Charlie'—a headstrong and gay young man, very gallant in his looks and manner; and my uncle, the Counsellor, chose to fancy that Charlie looked at me too much, coming by my grandfather's cottage."

Here Lorna blushed so that I was frightened and began to hate this Charlie more, a great deal more than even Carver Doone.

"He had better not," said I; "I will fling him over it, if he dare. He shall see thee through the roof, Lorna, if at all he see thee."

"Master Ridd, you are worse than Carver! I thought you were so kindhearted. Well, they wanted me to promise, and even to swear a solemn oath, a thing I have never done in my life, that I would wed my eldest cousin, this same Carver Doone, who is twice as old as I am, being thirty-five and upwards. That was why I gave the token that I wished to see you, Master Ridd. They pointed out how much it was for the peace of all the family, and for mine own benefit; but I would not listen for a moment, though the Counsellor was most eloquent, and my grandfather begged me to consider, and Carver smiled his pleasantest, which is a truly frightful thing. Then both he and his crafty father were for using force with me, but Sir Ensor would not hear of it; and they

Sir Ensor defends Lorna from a forced betrothal to Carver Doone.

have put off that extreme until he shall be past its knowledge, or, at least, beyond preventing it. And now I am watched and spied and followed, and half my little liberty seems to be taken from me. I could not be here speaking with you, even in my own nook and refuge, but for the aid and skill and courage of dear little Gwenny Carfax. She is now my chief reliance, and through her alone I hope to baffle all my enemies, since others have forsaken me."

Tears of sorrow and reproach were lurking in her soft, dark eyes, until, in fewest words, I told her that my seeming negligence was nothing but my bitter loss and wretched absence far away, of which I had so vainly striven to give any tidings without danger to her. When she heard all this, and saw what I had brought her from London, which was nothing less than a ring of pearls with a sapphire in the midst of them, as pretty as could well be found, she let the gentle tears flow fast, and came and sat so close beside me that I trembled like a folded sheep at the bleating of her lamb. But recovering comfort quickly, without more ado I raised her left hand and observed it with a nice regard, wondering at the small blue veins and curves and tapering whiteness, and the points it finished with. My wonder seemed to please her much, herself so well accustomed to it, and not fond of watching it. And then, before she could say a word, or guess what I was up to, as quick as ever I turned hand at a bout of wrestling, on her finger was my ring —sapphire for the veins of blue, and pearls to match white fingers.

"Oh, you crafty Master Ridd!" said Lorna, looking up at me, and blushing now a far brighter blush than when she spoke of Charlie; "I thought that you were much too simple ever to do this sort of thing."

With the large tears in her eyes—tears which seemed to me to rise partly from her want to love me with the power of my love —she put her pure, bright lips, half smiling, half prone to reply to tears, against my forehead, lined with trouble, doubt, and eager longing. And then she drew my ring from off that snowy twig her finger, and held it out to me; and then, seeing how my face was falling, thrice she touched it with her lips, and sweetly gave it back to me. "John, I dare not take it now, else I should be cheating you. I will try to love you dearly, even as you deserve and

wish. Keep it for me just till then. Something tells me I shall earn it in a very little time. Perhaps you will be sorry then, sorry when it is all too late, to be loved by such as I am."

What could I do at her mournful tone but kiss a thousand times the hand which she put up to warn me, and vow that I would rather die with one assurance of her love, than, without it, live forever with all besides that the world could give? Upon this she looked so lovely, with her dark eyelashes trembling, and her soft eyes full of light, and the color of clear sunrise mounting on her cheeks and brow, that I was forced to turn away, being overcome with beauty.

"Dearest darling, love of my life," I whispered through her clouds of hair, "how long must I wait to know; how long must I linger doubting whether you can ever stoop from your birth and wondrous beauty to a poor, coarse hind like me, an ignorant, unlettered yeoman—"

"I will not have you revile yourself," said Lorna, very tenderly —just as I had meant to make her. "You are not rude and unlettered, John. You know a great deal more than I do: you have learned both Greek and Latin, as you told me long ago, and you have been at the very best school in the west of England. None of us but my grandfather and the Counsellor can compare with you in this."

"Now, John," said Lorna, "Master John Ridd, it is high time for you to go home to your mother. I love your mother very much from what you have told me about her, and I will not have her cheated."

"If you truly love my mother," said I, very craftily, "the only way to show it is by truly loving me."

Upon that she laughed at me in the sweetest manner, and with such provoking ways and such come-and-go of glances and beginning of quick blushes, which she tried to laugh away, that I knew, as well as if she herself had told me, by some knowledge void of reasoning and the surer for it, I knew quite well, while all my heart was burning hot within me, and mine eyes were shy of hers, and her eyes were shy of mine, for certain and forever this I knew—that Lorna Doone had now begun, and would go on, to love me.

CHAPTER XVI

ANNIE GETS THE BEST OF IT

I HAD long outgrown unwholesome feeling as to my father's death, and so had Annie; though Lizzie, who must have loved him least, still entertained some evil will and longing for a punishment. Therefore I was surprised to find our Annie sitting, with all her best fal-lals upon her, in the churchyard by father's grave on the evening of our harvest revelling that year.

"What are you doing here, Annie?" I inquired, rather sternly, being vexed with her for having come here and frightened me.

"Nothing at all," said our Annie, shortly.

"Why, how so?" said I. "Miss Annie, what business have you here, doing nothing at this time of night? And leaving me with all the trouble to entertain our guests."

"You seem not to me to be doing it, John," Annie answered, softly; "what business have you here doing nothing, at this time of night?"

I was taken so aback with this, and the extreme impertinence of it, from a mere young girl like Annie, that I turned round to march away and have nothing more to say to her. But she jumped up, and caught me by the hand, and threw herself upon my bosom, with her face all wet with tears.

"Oh, John, I will tell you; I will tell you. Only don't be angry, John."

"Angry! no, indeed," said I, "what right have I to be angry with you, because you have your secrets? Every chit of a girl thinks now that she has a right to her secrets."

"And you have none of your own, John; of course, you have none of your own? All your going out alone toward the Doone glen—"

"We will not quarrel here, poor Annie," I answered, with some loftiness; "there are many things upon my mind which girls can have no notion of."

"And so there are upon mine, John. Oh, John, I will tell you everything, if you will look at me kindly and promise to forgive me. Oh, I am so miserable!"

Now this, though she was behaving so badly, moved me much toward her; especially as I longed to know what she had to tell me. Therefore I allowed her to coax me, and kiss me, and to lead me away a little, as far as the old yew-tree.

But, even in the shadow there, she was very long before beginning and seemed to have two minds about it, or rather, perhaps, a dozen; and she laid her cheek against the tree and sobbed till it was pitiful; and I knew what mother would say to her for spoiling her best frock so.

"Now, will you stop?" I said at last, harder than I meant it, for I knew that she would go on all night if any one encouraged her.

"Yes, I will stop," said Annie, panting; "you are very hard on me, John; but I know you mean it for the best. If somebody else —I am sure I don't know who, and have no right to know, no doubt, but she must be a wicked thing—if somebody else had been taken so with a pain all round the heart, John, and no power of telling it, perhaps you would have coaxed and kissed her, and come a little nearer, and made opportunity to be very loving."

Now this was so exactly what I had tried to do to Lorna, that my breath was almost taken away at Annie's so describing it. For a while I could not say a word, but wondered if she were a witch, which had never been in our family; and then, all of a sudden, I saw the way to get around her.

"From your knowledge of these things, Annie, you must have had them done to you. I demand to know this very moment who has taken such liberties."

"Then, John, you shall never know, if you ask in that manner. Besides, it was no liberty in the least of all. Cousins have a right to do things." Here Annie stopped quite suddenly, having so betrayed herself, but met me in the full moonlight, being resolved to face it out with a good face put upon it.

"Alas, I feared it would come to this," I answered, very sadly; "I know Tom Faggus has been here many a time, without showing himself to me. There is nothing meaner than for a man to sneak,

and steal a young maid's heart without her people knowing it."

"You are not doing anything of that sort yourself, then, dear John, are you?"

"Only a common highwayman!" I answered, without heeding her; "a man without an acre of his own, and liable to hang upon any common, and no other right of common over it—"

"John," said my sister, "are the Doones privileged not to be hanged upon common land?"

At this I was so thunderstruck that I leaped in the air like a shot rabbit.

Poor Annie was gone back again to our father's grave; and there she sat upon the turf, sobbing very gently, and not wishing to trouble any one. So I raised her tenderly, and made much of her, and consoled her, for I could not scold her there; and perhaps, after all, she was not to be blamed so much as Tom Faggus himself was. Annie was very grateful to me, and kissed me many times, and begged my pardon ever so often for her rudeness to me. And then having gone so far with it, and finding me so complaisant, she must needs try to go a little further, and to lead me away from her own affairs, and into mine concerning Lorna. But although it was clever enough of her, she was not deep enough for me there; and I soon discovered that she knew nothing, not even the name of my darling; but only suspected from things she had seen, and put together like a woman. Upon this I brought her back again to Tom Faggus and his doings.

"My poor Annie, have you really promised him to be his wife? Without even asking mother or me! Oh, Annie, it was wrong of you! I wish just to know the truth about you and Tom Faggus. Do you mean to marry him?"

"I to marry before my brother, and leave him with none to take care of him! Who can do him a red deer collop as I can? Come home, dear, at once, and I will do you one; for you never ate a morsel of supper, with all the people you had to attend upon."

This was true enough; and seeing no chance of anything more than cross-questions and crooked purposes, at which a girl was sure to beat me, I even allowed her to lead me home, with the thoughts of the collop uppermost. But I never counted upon being beaten so thoroughly as I was; for knowing me now to be off my

guard, the young hussy stopped at the farmyard gate, as if with a briar entangling her, and, while I was stooping to take it away, she looked me full in the face by the moonlight, and jerked out quite suddenly:

"Can your love do a collop, John?"

"No, I should hope not," I answered, rashly; "she is not a mere cook maid, I should hope, is Lorna Doone."

"Oh, Lorna Doone, Lorna Doone!" exclaimed our Annie, half frightened, yet clapping her hands with triumph, at having found me out so; "Lorna Doone is the lovely maiden who has stolen poor somebody's heart so. Ah, I shall remember it, because it is so queer a name. But stop, I had better write it down. Lend me your hat, poor boy, to write on."

"I have a great mind to lend you a box on the ear," I answered her in my vexation; "and I would if you had not been crying so, you sly, good-for-nothing baggage. As it is, I shall keep it for Master Faggus, and add interest for keeping."

"Oh, no, John; oh, no, John," she begged me earnestly, being sobered in a moment. "Your hand is so terribly heavy, John; and he never would forgive you; although he is so good-hearted, he cannot put up with an insult. Promise me, dear John, that you will not strike him; and I will promise you faithfully to keep your secret, even from mother, and even from Cousin Tom himself."

"And from Lizzie; most of all from Lizzie," I answered very eagerly, knowing too well which one of my family would be hardest with me."

"Of course from little Lizzie," said Annie, with some contempt; "a young thing like her cannot be kept too long, in my opinion, from the knowledge of such subjects. And, besides, I should be very sorry if Lizzie had the right to know your secrets, as I have, dearest John. Not a soul shall be the wiser for your having trusted me, John; although I shall be very wretched when you are late away at night, among those dreadful poeple."

"Well," I replied, "it is no use crying over spilt milk, Annie. You have my secret, and I have yours; and I scarcely know which of the two is likely to have the worst time of it when it comes to mother's ears. I could put up with perpetual scolding, but not with mother's sad silence."

What could I do at her mournful tone but kiss the hand which she put up to warn me

—*Page 100*

"That is exactly how I feel, John;" and as Annie said it she brightened up, and her soft eyes shone upon me; "but now I shall be much happier, dear; because I shall try to help you. No doubt the young lady deserves it, John. She is not after the farm, I hope?"

"She!" I exclaimed; and that was enough; there was so much scorn in my voice and face.

We entered the house quite gently. And then Annie said to me very slyly, between a smile and a blush:

"Don't you wish Lorna Doone was here, John, in the parlor along with mother?"

"Indeed, I do, Annie. I must kiss you for only thinking of it. Dear me, it seems as if you had known all about us for a twelvemonth."

"She loves you with all her heart, John? No doubt about that, of course." And Annie looked up at me, as much as to say she would like to know who could help it.

"That's the very thing she won't do," said I, knowing that Annie would love me all the more for it; "she is only beginning to like me, Annie; and as for loving, she is so young that she only loves her grandfather. But I hope she will come to it by and by."

"Of course she must," replied my sister; "it will be impossible for her to help it. But now you go into the parlor, dear, while I do your collop."

And so dear Annie gave me a little push into the parlor and there, behind the curtain drawn across the window seat, no less a man than Uncle Ben was sitting, half asleep and weary, and by his side a little girl, very quiet and very watchful. My mother led me to Uncle Ben, and he took my hand without rising, muttering something, not over polite, about my being bigger than ever.

"Now," he said "this is my granddaughter, and my heiress"—here he glanced at mother—"my heiress, little Ruth Huckaback."

"I am very glad to see you, Ruth," I answered, offering her my hand, which she seemed afraid to take; "welcome to Plover's Barrows, my good Cousin Ruth."

However, my good Cousin Ruth only arose, and made me a courtesy, and lifted her great brown eyes at me, more in fear, as I

thought, than kinship. And if ever any one looked unlike the heiress to great property, it was the little girl before me.

"Come out to the kitchen, dear, and let me chuck you to the ceiling," I said, just to encourage her; "I always do it to little girls; and then they can see the hams and bacon." But Uncle Reuben burst out laughing, and Ruth turned away with a deep, rich color.

"Do you know how old she is, you numskull?" said Uncle Ben, in his dryest drawl; "she was seventeen last July, sir."

"On the first of July, grandfather," Ruth whispered, with her back still to me; "but many people will not believe it."

Here mother came up to my rescue, as she always loved to do; and she said, "If my son may not toss Miss Ruth, at any rate he may dance with her. We have only been waiting for you, dear John, to have a little harvest dance, with the kitchen door thrown open."

There was no disobeying her without rudeness; and, indeed, the girl's feet were already jigging, and Lizzie giving herself wonderful airs with a roll of learned music; and even while Annie was doing my collop, her pretty round instep was arching itself, as I could see from the parlor door. So I took little Ruth and spun her around as the sound of the music came lively and ringing; and after us came all the rest, with much laughter, begging me not to jump over her; and anon my grave partner began to smile sweetly, and look up at me with the brightest of eyes, and drop me the prettiest courtesies.

Then Annie came sailing down the dance, with her beautiful hair flowing round her, the lightest figure in all the room, and the sweetest, and the loveliest. She was blushing, with her fair cheeks red beneath her dear blue eyes, as she met my glance of surprise and grief at the partner she was leaning on. It was Squire Marwood de Whichehalse. I would sooner have seen her with Tom Faggus. And to this effect I contrived to whisper; but she only said, "See to yourself, John. No, but let us both enjoy ourselves. You are not dancing with Lorna, John. But you seem uncommonly happy."

"Tush!" I said; "could I flip about so if I had my love with me?"

CHAPTER XVII

JOHN FRY'S ERRAND

NOW, many people may wish to know, as, indeed, I myself did very greatly, what had brought Master Huckaback over from Dulverton at that time of year, when the clothing business was most active on account of harvest wages, and when we could not attend to him properly by reason of our occupation.

His mode was, directly after breakfast, to pray to the Lord a little, which used not to be his practice, and then to go forth upon Dolly, the which was our Annie's pony, very quiet and respectful, with a bag of good victuals hung behind him and two great cavalry pistols in front. And he always wore his meanest clothes, as if expecting to be robbed and he never took his golden chronometer, neither his bag of money. He never returned until dark or more, just in time to be in before us, who were coming home from the harvest. And then Dolly always seemed very weary and stained with a muck from beyond our parish.

At last our Annie could stand her curiosity no longer, so she sent for John Fry and gave him full directions, how he was to slip out of the barley some morning so that none might miss him; and to run back to the black combe bottom, and there he would find the very same pony which Uncle Ben had been tied upon, and there is no faster upon the farm. And then, without waiting for any breakfast, unless he could eat it either running or trotting, he was to travel all up the black combe by the track Uncle Reuben had taken; and up at the top to look forward carefully, and so to trace him without being seen.

It was very bold in John to venture across that moor alone, even with a fast pony under him. And he would never have done so either for the sake of Annie's sweet face, or the golden guinea she gave him. But the truth was that he could not resist his own great curiosity.

Carefully spying across the moor, at first he could discover nothing having life and motion except three or four wild cattle roving in vain search for nourishment. But when John was taking his very last look, being only too eager to turn home again and acknowledged himself baffled, he thought he saw a figure moving in the farthest distance upon Black Barrow Down. As he watched the figure passed between him and a naked cliff, and appeared to be a man on horseback, making his way very carefully in fear of bogs and serpents. For all about there it is adders' ground, and large black serpents dwell in the marshes, and can swim as well as crawl. John knew that the man who was riding there could be none but Uncle Reuben, for none of the Doones ever passed that way and the shepherds were afraid of it.

At last John saw that, beyond all doubt, the man he was pursuing had taken the course which led down hill, and down the hill he must follow him. And this John did with deep misgivings, and a hearty wish that he had never started upon so perilous an errand. For soon he knew not where he was, and scarcely dared to ask himself, having heard of a horrible hole, somewhere in this neighborhood, called the Wizard's Slough. Therefore John rode down the slope with sorrow and great caution. And these grew more as he went onward, and his pony reared against him, being scared, although a native of the roughest moorland. Suddenly he turned a corner, and saw a scene which stopped him.

For there was the Wizard's Slough itself, as black as death, and bubbling, with a few scant yellow reeds in a ring around it. Outside these bright watergrass of the liveliest green was creeping, tempting any unwary foot to step and plunge and founder. And on the marge were blue campanula, sundew, and forget-me-not, such as no child could resist.

Of this horrible quagmire, the worst upon all Exmoor, John had heard from his grandfather, and this made him the more desirous to have a good look at it now, only with his girths well up to turn away and flee at speed if anything should happen. At the other side of the slough, and a few land yards beyond it, where the ground was less noisome, he had observed a felled tree lying over a great hole in the earth, with staves of wood, and slabs of stone, and some yellow gravel around it. But the flags of reeds

around the morass partly screened it from his eyes, and he could not make out the meaning of it, except that it meant no good, and probably was witchcraft. Yet Dolly seemed not to be harmed by it, for there she was as large as life, tied to a stump not far beyond, and flipping the flies away with her tail.

While John was trembling within himself lest Dolly should get scent of his pony, and neigh and reveal their presence, although she could not see them, suddenly, to his great amazement, something white arose out of the hole, under the brown trunk of the tree. Seeing this, his blood went back within him; yet was he not able to turn and flee, but rooted his face in among the loose stones, and kept his quivering shoulders back, and prayed to God to protect him. However, the white thing itself was not so very awful, being nothing more than a long-coned nightcap with a tassel on the top, such as criminals wear at hanging time. But when John saw a man's face under it, and a man's neck and shoulders slowly rising out of the pit, he could not doubt that this was the place where the murderers come to life again, according to an Exmoor story. He knew that a man had been hanged last week, and that this was the ninth day after it.

Therefore he could bear no more, thoroughly brave as he had been; neither did he wait to see what became of the gallowsman, but climbed on his horse with what speed he might and rode away at full gallop.

The story told by John Fry made me very uneasy, especially as following upon the warning of Judge Jeffreys, and the hints received from Jeremy Stickles. We knew for certain that at Taunton, Bridgewater, and even Dulverton, there was much disaffection towards the king, and regret for the days of Puritans. Albeit I had told the truth, and the pure and simple truth, when, upon my examination, I had assured his lordship that, to the best of my knowledge, there was nothing of the sort with us.

But now I was beginning to doubt whether I might not have been mistaken; especially when we heard, as we did, of arms being landed at Lynmouth in the dead of the night, and of the tramp of men having reached someone's ears from a hill where a famous echo was. For it must be plain to any conspirator that for the secret muster of men, and the stowing of unlawful arms, and communica-

tion by beacon lights, scarcely a fitter place could be found than the wilds of Exmoor, with deep ravines running far inland from an unwatched and mostly a sheltered sea.

But even supposing it probable that something against King Charles the Second, or rather against his Roman advisers, and especially his brother, were now in preparation among us, was it likely that Master Huckaback, a wealthy man and a careful one, known, moreover, to the lord chief justice, would have anything to do with it? To this I could not answer. Uncle Ben was so close a man, so avaricious, and so revengeful, that it was quite impossible to say what course he might pursue, without knowing all the chances of gain, or rise, or satisfaction to him. That he hated the Papists I knew full well, though he never spoke much about them; also, that he had followed the march of Oliver Cromwell's army, but more as a sutler, people said, than as a real soldier; and that he would go a long way, and risk a great deal of money, to have his revenge on the Doones, although their name never passed his lips during the present visit.

Before I could quite make up my mind how to act in this difficulty, and how to get at the rights of it, for I would not spy after Uncle Reuben, Uncle Ben went away as suddenly as he first had come to us, giving no reason for his departure, neither claiming the pony.

Now that same night I think it was, or, at any rate, the next one, I noticed Betty Muxworthy, our maid, going on most strangely. She made the queerest signs to me, when nobody was looking, and laid her fingers on her lips, and pointed over her shoulders. But I took little heed of her, being in a kind of dudgeon, and oppressed with evil luck; believing, too, that all she wanted was to have some little grumble about some petty grievances.

But presently she poked me with the heel of a fire bundle, and passing close to my ear whispered, so that none else could hear her, "Larna Doo-un."

By these words I was so startled that I turned round and stared at her; but she pretended not to know it, and began with all her might to scour an empty crock with a besom.

"Oh, Betty, let me help you! That work is much too hard for you," I cried with a sudden chivalry.

Favoring me with another wink, to which I now paid the keenest heed, Betty went and fetched the lanthorn from the hook inside the door. Then, when she had kindled it, not allowing me any time to ask what she was after, she went outside and pointing to the great bock of pig wash, she said to me as quietly as a maiden might ask one to carry a glove, "Jan Ridd, carr thic thing for me."

So I carried it for her, without any words; wondering what she was up to next, and when we came to hog-pound, she turned upon me suddenly, with the lanthorn she was bearing, and saw that I had the bock by one hand very easily.

"Jan Ridd," she said, "there be no other man in England cud a' dood it. Now thee shalt have Larna."

"I will have her, or I will die, Betty," I said.

"And do her love thee too, Jan?" Betty asked.

"I hope she does, Betty. I hope she does. What do you think about it?"

I bent my head quite close to her; and she whispered in my ear: "Goo of a marning. Her can't get out of an avening now, her hath zent word to me, to tull 'ee."

CHAPTER XVIII

AN EARLY MORNING CALL

OF course I was up the very next morning before the October sunrise, and away through the wild and the woodland towards the Bagworthy water, at the foot of the long cascade. And soon I saw my Lorna coming, purer than the morning dew, than the sun more bright and clear. Down the valley she came, not witting that I looked at her, having ceased to expect me yet awhile; or, at least, she told herself so. In the joy of awakened life and brightness of the morning, she had cast all care away, and seemed to float upon the sunrise, like a buoyant silver wave. Suddenly, at sight of me, for I leaped forth at once in fear of seeming to watch her unawares, the bloom upon her cheeks was deepened, and the radiance of her eyes; and she came to meet me gladly.

"At last, then, you are come, John. I thought you had forgotten me. I could not make you understand—they have kept me prisoner every evening: but come into my house; you are in danger here."

Meanwhile I could not answer, being overcome with joy; but followed to her little grotto where I had been twice before. I knew that the crowning moment of my life was coming—that Lorna would own her love for me.

She made for a while as if she dreamed not of the meaning of my gaze, but tried to speak of other things, faltering now and then, and mantling with a richer damask below her long eyelashes.

"This is not what I came to know," I whispered very softly; "you know what I am come to ask."

"If you are come on purpose to ask anything, why do you delay so?" She turned away very bravely, but I saw that her lips were trembling.

"I delay so long, because I fear; because my whole life hangs in balance on a single word; because what I have near me now

may never more be near me after, though more than all the world, or than a thousand worlds, to me." As I spoke these words of passion in a low, soft voice, Lorna trembled more and more, but she made no answer, neither yet looked up at me.

"I have loved you long and long," I pursued, being reckless now; "when you were a little child, as a boy I worshipped you; then when I saw you a comely girl, as a stripling I adored you: now that you are a full-grown maiden, all the rest I do, and more—I love you more than tongue can tell or heart can hold in silence. I have waited long and long and though I am so far below you, I can wait no longer; but must have my answer."

"You have been very faithful, John," she murmured to the fern and moss; "I suppose I must reward you."

"That will not do for me," I said; "I will not have reluctant liking, nor assent for pity's sake which only means endurance. I must have all love, or none; I must have your heart of hearts, even as you have mine, Lorna."

While I spoke, she glanced up shyly through her fluttering lashes, to prolong my doubt one moment, for her own delicious pride. Then she opened wide upon me all the glorious depth and softness of her loving eyes, and flung both arms around my neck, and answered with her heart on mine:

"Darling, you have won it all. I shall never be my own again. I am yours, my own one, forever and forever."

I am sure I know not what I did, or what I said thereafter, being overcome with transport by her words and at her gaze. Only one thing I remember, when she raised her bright lips to me, like a child, for me to kiss, such a smile of sweet temptation met me through her flowing hair that I almost forgot my manners, giving her no time to breathe.

"That will do," said Lorna gently, but violently blushing; "for the present that will do, John. And now remember one thing, dear. All the kindness is to be on my side and you are to be very distant, as behooves to a young maiden, except when I invite you. But you may kiss my hand, John; oh, yes, you may kiss my hand, you know. Ah, to be sure! I had forgotten; how very stupid of me!"

For by this time I had taken one sweet hand, and gazed on it

with the pride of all the world to think that such a lovely thing was mine; and then I slipped my little ring upon the wedding finger; and this time Lorna kept it, and looked with fondness on its beauty, and clung to me with a flood of tears.

"Every time you cry," said I, drawing her closer to me, "I shall consider it an invitation not to be too distant. There now, none shall make you weep. Darling, you shall sigh no more, but live in peace and happiness with me to guard and cherish you: and who shall dare to vex you?" But she drew a long, sad sigh, and looked at the ground with the great tears rolling, and pressed one hand upon the trouble of her pure young breast.

"It can never, never be," she murmured to herself alone. "Who am I, to dream of it? Something in my heart tells me it can be so never, never."

There was, however, no possibility of depressing me at such a time. To be loved by Lorna, the sweet, the pure, the playful one, the fairest creature on God's earth and the most enchanting, the lady of high birth and mind; that I, a mere clumsy blundering yeoman, without wit, or wealth, or lineage, should have won that loving heart to be my own forever, was a thought no fears could lesson and no chance could steal from me.

Therefore, at her own entreaty taking a very quick adieu, and by her own invitation an exceeding kind one, I hurried home with deep exulting, yet some sad misgivings, for Lorna had made me promise now to tell my mother everything; as, indeed, I always meant to do, when my suit should be gone too far to stop.

Unluckily for my designs, who should be sitting down at breakfast with my mother and the rest but Squire Faggus, as everybody now began to entitle him. I noticed something odd about him, something uncomfortable in his manner, and a lack of that ease and humor which had been wont to distinguish him. He took his breakfast as it came, without a single joke about it, or preference of this to that; but with sly, soft looks at Annie, who seemed unable to sit quiet, or to look at any one steadfastly. I feared in my heart what was coming on, and felt truly sorry for poor mother. After breakfast, it became my duty to see to the ploughing of a barley stubble ready for the sowing of French grass, and I asked Tom Faggus to come with me; but he refused,

Only one thing I remember, when she raised her bright lips to me.

and I knew the reason. Being resolved to allow him fair field to himself, though with great displeasure that a man of such illegal repute should marry into our family, which had always been counted so honest, I carried my dinner upon my back, and spent the whole day with the furrows.

When I returned Squire Faggus was gone; which appeared to me but a sorry sign, inasmuch as if mother had taken kindly to him and to his intentions, she would surely have made him remain awhile to celebrate the occasion. And presently no doubt was left, for Lizzie came running to meet me at the bottom of the wood-rick, and cried:

"Oh, John, there is such a business. Mother is in such state of mind, and Annie crying her eyes out. What do you think? You never would guess, though I have suspected it ever so long."

"No need for me to guess," I replied, "I knew all about it long ago. You have not been crying much, I see. I should like you better if you had."

"Why should I cry? I like Tom Faggus. He is the only one I ever see with the spirit of a man."

This was a cut, of course, at me. Mr. Faggus had won the good will of Lizzie by his hatred of the Doones, and vows that if he could get a dozen men of any courage to join him he would pull their stronghold about their ears without any more ado. This malice of his seemed strange to me, as he had never suffered at their hands, so far, at least, as I knew; was it to be attributed to his jealousy of outlaws who excelled him in his business? Not being good at repartee, I made no answer to Lizzie, and so we entered the house together; and mother sent at once for me while I was trying to console my darling sister Annie.

"Oh, John! Speak one good word for me," she cried, with both hands laid in mine, and her tearful eyes looking up to me.

"Not one, my pet, but a hundred," I answered, kindly embracing her; " have no fear, little sister, I am going to make your case so bright, by comparison, I mean, that mother will send for you in five minutes, and call you her best, her most dutiful child, and praise Cousin Tom to the skies, and send a man on horseback after him; and then you will have a harder task tc intercede for me, my dear."

"Oh, John, dear John, you won't tell her about Lorna—oh, not today, dear."

"Yes, today, and at once, Annie. I want to have it over, and be done with it."

"Oh, but think of her, dear. I am sure she could not bear it, after this great shock already."

"She will bear it all the better," said I; "the one will drive the other out. I know exactly what mother is. She will be desperately savage first with you, and then with me, and then for a very little while with both of us together; and then she will put one against the other, and consider which was most to blame. Then she will remember how good we have always been to her, and how like our father. Upon that, she will think of her own love-time, and sigh a good bit, and cry a little, and then smile, and send for both of us, and beg our pardon, and call us her two darlings."

"Now, John, how on earth can you know all that?" exclaimed my sister, wiping her eyes, and gazing at me with a soft, bright smile. "Who on earth can have told you, John? People to call you stupid, indeed! Why, I feel that all you say is quite true, because you describe so exactly what I should do myself; I mean—I mean if I had two children, who had behaved as we have done. But tell me, darling John, how you learned all this."

"Never you mind," I replied, with a nod of some conceit, I fear; "I must be a fool if I did not know what mother is by this time."

Now inasmuch as the thing befell according to my prediction, what need for me to dwell upon it, after saying how it would be? Moreover, I would regret to write down what mother said about Lorna, in her first surprise and tribulation; not only because I was grieved by the gross injustice of it and frightened mother with her own words but rather because it is not well, when people repent of hasty speech, to enter it against them.

That is said to be the angels' business; and I doubt if they can attend to it much, without doing injury to themselves.

However, by the afternoon, when the sun began to go down upon us, our mother sat on the garden bench, with her head on my great otter skin waistcoat and her right arm around our Annie's waist, and scarcely knowing which of us she ought to make the

most of, or which deserved most pity. Not that she had forgiven yet the rivals to her love—Tom Faggus, I mean, and Lorna—but that she was beginning to think a little better of them now, and a vast deal better of her own children.

CHAPTER XIX

JOHN RETURNS TO BUSINESS

AFTER this, for another month, nothing worthy of notice happened except, of course, that I found it needful to visit Lorna soon after my discourse with mother and to tell her all about it.

When I told her how my mother and Annie, as well as myself longed to have her at Plover's Barrows and teach her all the quiet duties in which she was sure to take such delight, she only answered with a bright blush that while her grandfather was living she would never leave him; and that even if she were free, certain ruin was all she could bring to any house that received her. This was too plain to be denied, and seeing my dejection at it, she told me bravely that we must hope for better times, if possible, and asked how long I would wait for her.

"Not a day, if I had my will," I answered, very warmly; at which she turned away confused, and would not look at me for a while; "but all my life," I went on to say, "if my fortune is so ill. And how long would you wait for me, Lorna?"

"Till I could get you," she answered slyly, with a smile which was brighter to me than the brightest wit could be. "And now," she continued, "you bound me, John, with a very beautiful ring to you, and when I dare not wear it, I carry it always on my heart. But I will bind you to me, you dearest, with the very poorest and plainest thing that ever you set eyes on. I could give you fifty fairer ones, but they would not be honest; and I love you for your honesty, and nothing else, of course, John; so don't you be conceited.

"Look at it, what a queer old thing! There are some ancient marks upon it, very grotesque and wonderful; it looks like a cat in a tree almost; but never mind what it looks like. This old ring must have been a giant's; therefore it will fit you, perhaps, you enormous John. It has been on the front of my old glass necklace ever since I can remember; and long before that, as some woman

told me. Now you seem very greatly amazed; pray, what thinks my lord of it?"

"That it is worth fifty of the pearl thing which I gave you, you darling; and that I will not take it from you."

"Then you will never take me, that is all. I will have nothing to do with a gentleman—"

"No gentleman, dear—a yeoman."

"Very well, a yeoman—nothing to do with a yeoman who will not accept my love-gage. So, if you please, give it back again, and take your lovely ring back."

She looked at me in such a manner, half in earnest, half in jest, and three times three in love, that in spite of all good resolutions and her own faint protest, I was forced to abandon all firm ideas, and kiss her till she was quite ashamed, and her head hung on my bosom, with the night of her hair shed over me. Then I placed the pearl ring back on the finger she held up to scold me; and on my own smallest finger drew the heavy hoop she had given me. I considered this with satisfaction, until my darling recovered herself; and then I began very gravely about it, to keep her from chiding me:

Mistress Lorna, this is not the ring of any giant. It is nothing more nor less than a very ancient thumb ring, such as once in my father's time was ploughed up out of the ground in our farm and sent to learned doctors, who told us all about it, but kept the ring for their trouble. I will accept it, my own one love, and it shall go to my grave with me."

Now I have spoken about this ring because it holds an important part in the history of my Lorna. I asked her where the glass necklace was from which the ring was fastened and which she had worn in her childhood, and she answered that she hardly knew, but remembered that her grandfather had begged her to give it up to him when she was ten years old or so, and had promised to keep it for her until she could take care of it; at the same time giving her back the ring, and fastening it from her pretty neck, and telling her to be proud of it. And so she always had been, and now from her sweet breast she took it, and it became John Ridd's delight.

Now November was upon us, and we had kept Allhallowmas with

roasting of skewered apples, like so many shuttlecocks, and after that the day of Fawkes, as became good Protestants, with merry bonfires and burned batatas, and plenty of good feeding in honor of our religion; and then, while we were at wheat-sowing, another visitor arrived.

This was Master Jeremy Stickles, who had been a good friend to me in London. And he seemed inclined to make our farm house his headquarters and kept us quite at his beck and call, going out at any time of the morning and always expecting us to be ready, whether with horse, or man, or fire, or provisions. We knew that he was employed somehow upon the service of the king, and had at different stations certain troopers and orderlies, quite at his disposal; also we knew that he never went out, nor even slept in his bedroom, without heavy firearms well loaded, and a sharp sword nigh his hand; and that he held a great commission under royal signet, requiring all good subjects, all officers of whatever degree, and especially justices of the peace, to aid him to the utmost with person, beast, and chattel, or to answer it at their peril.

Now Master Jeremy Stickles, of course, knowing well what women are, durst not open to any of them the nature of his instructions. But after a while, perceiving that I could be relied upon, and that it was a great discomfort not to have me with him, he took me aside in a lonely place and told me nearly everything.

"John," he said, "you have some right to know the meaning of all this, being trusted as you were by the lord chief justice. But he found you scarcely supple enough, neither gifted with due brains."

"Thank God for that same," I answered, while he tapped his head to signify his own much larger allowance. Then he made me bind myself, which in an evil hour I did, to retain his secret; and after that he went on solemnly and with much importance:

"There be some people fit to plot, and others to be plotted against, and others to unravel plots, which is the highest gift of all. This last hath fallen to my share, and a very thankless gift it is, although a rare and choice one. Much of peril, too, attends it; daring courage and great coolness are as needful for the work as ready wit and spotless honor. Therefore his majesty's advisers have chosen me for this high task."

"Things are changed since you were in town. The Whigs are getting up again, through the folly of the Tories in killing poor Lord Russell; and now this Master Sidney, if my lord condemns him, will make it worse again. There is much disaffection everywhere, and it must grow to an outbreak. The king hath many troops in London, and meaneth to bring more from Tangier; but he cannot command these country places; and the trained bands cannot help him much, even if they would."

"Now, in ten words, without parties, or trying thy poor brain too much, I am here to watch the gathering of a secret plot, not as much against the king as against the due succession."

"Now I understand at last. But, Master Stickles, you might have said all that days ago."

"It would have been better, if I had, to thee," he replied, with much compassion; "thy hat is nearly off thy head with the swelling of brain I have given thee. Blows, blows, are thy business, Jack. There thou art in thine element. And, haply, this business will bring thee plenty, even for thy great head to take. Now hearken to one who wishes thee well, and plainly sees the end of it—stick thou to the winning side, and have nought to do with the other one."

"That," said I, in great haste and hurry, "is the very thing I want to do, if I only knew which was the winning side, for the sake of Lorna—that is to say, for the sake of my dear mother and sisters, and the farm."

"Ha!" cried Jeremy Stickles, laughing at the redness of my face—"Lorna, saidst thou; now what Lorna?"

"Keep to your own business," I answered, very proudly; "spy as much as e'er thou wilt, and use our house for doing it without asking leave or telling; but if I ever find thee spying into my affairs, all the king's lifeguards in London and the dragoons thou bringest hither shall not save thee from my hand—or one finger is enough for thee."

Being carried beyond myself by his insolence about Lorna, I looked at Master Stickles so, and spake in such a voice that all his daring courage and his spotless honor quailed within him, and he shrank as if I would strike so small a man.

So for the present a breach was made between Master Jeremy

and myself, which to me seemed no great loss, inasmuch as it relieved me from any privity to his dealings, for which I had small liking. All I feared was lest I might, in any way, be ungrateful to him; but when he would have no more of me, what could I do to help it. However, in a few days' time I was of good service to him, as you shall see in its proper place .

But now my own affairs were thrown into such disorder that I could think of nothing else, and had the greatest difficulty in hiding my uneasiness. For suddenly, without any warning, or a word of message, all my Lorna's signals ceased, which I had been accustomed to watch for daily and, as it were, feed upon with a glowing heart. The first time I stood on the wooded crest and found no change from yesterday, I could hardly believe my eyes, or thought, at least, that it must be some great mistake on the part of my love. However, even that oppressed me with a heavy heart, which grew heavier as I found from day to day no token.

Three times I went and waited long at the bottom of the valley, where now the stream was brown and angry with the rains of the autumn, and the weeping trees hung leafless. But though I waited at every hour of day, and far into the night, no light footstep came to meet me, no sweet voice was in the air; all was lonely, drear, and drenched with sodden desolation. It seemed as if my love was dead, and the winds were at her funeral.

Once I sought far up the valley where I had never been before, even beyond the copse where Lorna had found and lost her brave young cousin. Following up the river channel, in shelter of the evening fog, I gained a corner within stone's throw of the last outlying cot. This was a gloomy, low, square house, without any light in the windows, roughly built of wood and stone, as I saw when I drew nearer. For knowing it to be Carver's dwelling, or at least suspecting so from some words of Lorna's, I was led by curiosity, and perhaps by jealousy, to have a closer look at it. Therefore I crept up the stream, losing half my sense of fear by reason of anxiety. And, in truth, there was not much to fear, the sky being now too dark for even a shooter of wild fowl to make good aim. And nothing else but guns could hurt me, as in the pride of my strength I thought, and in my skin of single-stick.

Nevertheless, I went warily, being now almost among this nest

of cockatrices. The back of Carver's house abutted on the waves of the rushing stream; and seeing a loop-hole, vacant for muskets, I looked in, but all was quiet. So far as I could judge by listening, there was no one now inside, and my heart for a moment leaped with joy, for I had feared to find Lorna there. Then I took a careful survey of the dwelling and its windows and its doors and aspect, as if I had been a robber meaning to make privy entrance. It was well for me that I did this, as you will find hereafter.

Having impressed upon my mind all the bearings of the place, and all its opportunities, and even the curve of the stream along it, and the bushes near the door, I was much inclined to go farther up and understand all the village. But a bar of red light across the river, some forty yards on above me and crossing from the opposite side like a chain, prevented me. In that second house there was a gathering of loud and merry outlaws, making as much noise as if they had the law upon their side. Some, indeed, as I approached, were laying down both right and wrong, as purely and with as high a sense as if they knew the difference. Cold and troubled as I was, I could hardly keep from laughing.

Before I betook myself home that night, and eased dear mother's heart so much, and made her pale face spread with smiles, I had resolved to penetrate Glen Doone from the upper end and learn all about my Lorna. Not but what I might have entered from my unsuspected channel, as so often I had done, but that I saw fearful need for knowing something more than that. Here was every sort of trouble gathering upon me; here was Jeremy Stickles stealing upon every one in the dark; here was Uncle Reuben plotting, Satan only could tell what; here was a white-nightcapped man coming bodily from the grave; here was my own sister Annie committed to a highwayman; most of all was my Lorna stolen, perhaps dungeoned. It was no time for shilly-shally, for the balance of this and that, or for a man with blood and muscle to pat his nose and ponder.

CHAPTER XX

A VERY DESPERATE VENTURE

THE journey was a great deal longer to fetch around the southern hills, and enter by the Doon gate, than to cross the lower land and steal in by the water slide. However, I durst not take a horse, for fear of the Doones who might be abroad upon their usual business, but started betimes in the evening, so as not to hurry, or waste any strength upon the way. And thus I came to the robbers' highway, walking circumspectly, scanning the sky line of every hill, and searching the folds of every valley for any moving figure.

As the road approached the entrance it became more straight and strong, like a channel cut from rock, with the water brawling darkly along the naked side of it. Not a tree or bush was left, to shelter a man from bullets; all was stern and stiff and rugged, as I could not help perceiving even through the darkness; and a smell as of churchyard mould, a sense of being boxed in and cooped made me long to be out again.

All across and before the three rude and beetling entrance archways hung a felled oak, black and thick and threatening. This, as I heard before, could be let fall in a moment so as to crush a score of men, and bar the approach of horses. Behind this tree, the rocky mouth was spanned, as by a gallery, with brushwood and piled timber, all upon a ledge of stone where thirty men might lurk unseen and fire at any invader. From that rampart it would be impossible to dislodge them, because the rock fell sheer below them twenty feet, or, it may be, more; while overhead it towered three hundred, and so jutted over that nothing could be cast upon them, even if a man could climb the height. And the access to this portcullis place—if I may so call it, being no portcullis there—was through certain rocky chambers known to the tenants only.

But the cleverest of their devices and the most puzzling to an enemy, was that, instead of one mouth only, there were three to

choose from, with nothing to betoken which was the proper access; all being pretty much alike, and all unfenced and yawning. And the common rumor was that in times of any danger, when any force was known to be on muster in their neighborhood, they changed their entrance every day, and diverted the other two, by means of sliding doors, to the chasms and dark abysses.

Now I could see those three rough arches, jagged, black, and terrible; and I knew that only one of them could lead me to the valley. However, I plunged into the middle way, holding a long ash staff before me, shodden at the end with iron. Presently I had fair view and outline of the robbers' township spread with bushes here and there, but not heavily overshadowed.

I knew that the captain's house was first, both from what Lorna had said of it. and from my mother's description. In the moonlight, I saw a dim form, one of the robbers, of course, halt there for a certain time, and whistle on his fingers, and hurry on. The tune that he whistled was strange to me, and lingered in my ears, as having something very new and striking and fantastic in it. And I repeated it softly to myself, while I marked the position of the houses and the beauty of the village.

He went on down the village, and I followed him carefully, keeping as much as possible in the shadowy places, and watching the windows of every house, lest any light should be burning. As I passed Sir Ensor's house my heart leaped up, for I spied a window, higher than the rest above the ground, and with a faint light moving. This could hardly fail to be the room wherein my darling lay; for here that impudent young fellow had gazed while he was whistling. And here my courage grew tenfold, and my spirit feared no evil—for lo, if Lorna had been surrendered to that scoundrel, Carver, she would not have been at her grandfather's house, but in Carver's accursed dwelling.

My heart was in my mouth when I stood in the shade by Lorna's window and whispered her name gently. The house was of one-story only, as the others were, with pine ends standing forth the stone, and only two rough windows upon that western side of it, and perhaps both of them were Lorna's. The Doones had been their own builders, for no one should know their ins and outs; and their work was clumsy. As for their windows, they stole them

mostly from the houses round about. But though the window was not very close, I might have whispered long enough before she would have answered me; frightened as she was, no doubt, by many a rude overture. And I durst not speak aloud, because I saw a watchman posted on the western cliff, and commanding all the valley. And now this man espied me against the wall of the house, and advanced to the brink, and challenged me.

"Who are you there? Answer! One, two, three; and I fire at thee."

The nozzle of his gun was pointed full upon me, as I could see with the moonlight striking on the barrel; he was not more than fifty yards off, and now he began to reckon. Being almost desperate about it, I began to whistle, wondering how far I should get before I lost my windpipe: and as luck would have it, my lips fell into that strange tune, the one I had heard from the Doone. My mouth would scarcely frame the notes, being parched with terror; but, to my surprise, the man fell back, dropped his gun and saluted.

That tune was Carver Doone's passport, which Charleworth Doone, whose form it was I had seen, had imitated, for decoy of Lorna. The sentinel took me for that vile Carver; who was like enough to be prowling there, for private talk with Lorna; but not very likely to shout forth his name, if it might be avoided. The watchman, perceiving the danger, perhaps, of intruding on Carver's privacy, not only retired along the cliff, but withdrew himself to good distance.

Meanwhile he had done me the kindest service; for Lorna came to the window at once, to see what the cause of the shout was, and drew back the curtain timidly. Then she opened the rough lattice; and then she watched the cliff and trees; and then she sighed very sadly.

"Oh, Lorna, don't you know me?" I whispered from the side, being afraid of startling her by appearing oversuddenly.

Quick though she always was of thought, she knew me not from my whisper, and was shutting the window hastily, when I caught it back and showed myself.

"John!" she cried, yet with sense enough not to speak aloud; "oh, you must be mad, John."

Who are you there? Answer! one, two, three, and I fire at thee.

—*Page 126*

"As mad as a March hare," said I, "without any news of my darling. You knew I would come: of course you did."

"Well, I thought, perhaps—you know: now, John, you need not eat my hand. Do you see they have put iron bars across?"

"To be sure. Do you think I should be contented, even with this lovely hand, but for these vile iron bars. I will have them out before I go. Now, darling, for one moment—just the other hand, for a change, you know."

So I got the other, but was not honest; for I kept them both, and felt their delicate beauty trembling, as I laid them to my heart."

"Oh, John, you will make me cry directly"—she had been crying long ago—"if you go on in that way. You know we can never have one another; everyone is against it. Why should I make you miserable? Try not to think of me any more."

"And will you try the same of me, Lorna?"

"Oh, yes, John, if you agree to it. At least I will try to try it."

"Then you won't try anything of the sort," I cried, with great enthusiasm, for her tone was so nice and melancholy; "the only thing we will try to try, is to belong to one another. And if we do our best, Lorna, God alone can prevent us."

She crossed herself, with one hand drawn free, as I spoke so boldly; and something swelled in her little throat, and prevented her from answering.

"Now tell me," I said; "what means all this? Why are you so pent up here? Why have you given me no token? Has your grandfather turned against you? Are you in any danger?"

"My poor grandfather is very ill: I fear that he will not live long. The Counsellor and his son are now the masters of the valley; and I dare not venture forth, for fear of anything they might do to me. When I went forth to signal for you, Carver tried to seize me but I was too quick for him. Little Gwenny is not allowed to leave the valley now, so that I could send no message. I have been so wretched, dear, lest you should think me false to you. The tyrants now make sure of me. You must watch this house both night and day if you wish to save me. There is nothing they would shrink from, if my poor grandfather—oh, I cannot bear to think of

myself, when I ought to think of him only; dying without a son to tend him, or a daughter to shed a tear."

"But surely he has comrades enough; and a deal too many," I was going to say, but stopped myself in time. "Why do none of them come to him?"

"I know not. I cannot tell. He is a very strange old man; and few have ever loved him. He was black with wrath at the Counsellor this very afternoon—but I must not keep you here—you are much too brave, John; and I am much too selfish; there, what was that shadow?"

"Nothing more than a bat, darling, come to look for his sweetheart. I will not stay long; you tremble so: and yet for that very reason, how can I leave you, Lorna?"

"You must—you must," she answered; "I shall die if they hurt you. I hear the old nurse moving. Grandfather is sure to send for me. Keep back from the window."

However, it was only Gwenny Carfax, Lorna's little handmaid; my darling brought her to the window, and presented her to me, almost laughing through her grief.

"Oh, I am so glad, John; Gwenny, I am so glad you came. I have wanted long to introduce you to my 'young man,' as you call him. It is rather dark, but you can see him. I wish you to know him again, Gwenny."

"Whoy!" cried Gwenny, with great amazement, standing on tiptoe to look out, and staring as if she were weighing me; "he be bigger nor any Doone! Heared as he have bate our Carnish champion wrastling. Twadn't fair play nohow; no, no; don't tell me, twadn't fair play nohow."

"True enough, Gwenny," I answered her; for the play had been very unfair indeed on the side of the Bodmin champion: "it was not a fair bout, little maid; I am free to acknowledge that." By that answer, or, rather, by the construction she put upon it, the heart of the Cornish girl was won, more than by gold and silver.

"She is the best little thing in the world," said Lorna, softly laughing; "and the queerest and the truest. Nothing will bribe her against me. If she seems to be on the other side, never, never, doubt her. Now no more of your 'coortin.' John! I love you far too well for that. Yes, yes, ever so much! If you will take a

mean advantage of me. As much as ever you like to imagine; and then you may double it, after that. Only go, do go, good John; kind, dear, darling John; if you love me, go."

"How can I go, without settling anything?" I asked very sensibly. "How shall I know of your danger now? Hit upon something, you are so quick. Anything you can think of; and then I will go and not frighten you."

"I have been thinking long of something," Lorna answered rapidly, with that peculiar clearness of voice which made every syllable ring like music; "you see that tree with the seven rooks' nests, bright against the cliffs there? Can you count them from above, do you think? From a place where you will be safe, dear—"

"No doubt, I can; or if I cannot, it will not take me long to find a spot whence I can do it."

"Gwenny can climb like any cat. She has been up there in the summer, watching the young birds, day by day, and daring the boys to touch them. There are neither birds nor eggs there now, of course, and nothing doing. If you see but six rooks' nests, I am in peril, and want you. If you see but five, I am carried off by Carver."

"Good God!" said I, at the mere idea, in a tone which frightened Lorna.

"Fear not, John," she whispered sadly, and my blood grew cold at it; "I have means to stop him; or, at least, to save myself. If you can come within one day of that man's getting hold of me, you will find me quite unharmed. After that you will find me dead or alive, according to circumstances, but in no case such that you need blush to look at me."

Her dear, sweet face was full of pride, as even in the gloom I saw; and I would not trespass on her feelings, by such a thing, at such a moment, as an attempt at any caress. I only said, "God bless you, darling!" and she said the same to me, in a very low, sad voice. And then I stole below Carver's house, in the shadow from the eastern cliff; and knowing enough of the village now to satisfy all necessity, betook myself to my well-known track in returning from the valley.

CHAPTER XXI

A GOOD TURN FOR JEREMY

EVER since I had offended Jeremy Stickles, he had more and more allied himself with simple-minded John, as he was pleased to call him. John Fry was everything: it was "run and fetch my horse, John"—"John, are my pistols primed well?"—"I want you in the stable, John, about something very particular;" until, except for the rudeness of it, I was longing to tell Master Stickles that he ought to pay John's wages. John, for his part, was not backward, but gave himself the most wonderful airs of secrecy and importance, till half the parish began to think that the affairs of the nation were in his hand, and he scorned the sight of a dung fork.

But I did not suspect in my stupid noddle that John Fry would ever tell Jeremy Stickles about the sight at the Wizard's Slough and the man in the white nightcap; because John had sworn on the blade of his knife not to breathe a word to any soul, without my full permission. However, it appears that John related, for a certain consideration, all that he had seen and doubtless more, which had accrued to it. Upon this Master Stickles was much astonished at Uncle Reuben's proceedings, having always accounted him a most loyal, keen, and wary subject.

All this I learned upon recovering Jeremy's good graces, which came to pass in no other way than by the saving of his life.

Being bound to keep the strictest watch upon the seven rooks' nests, and yet not bearing to be idle and to waste my mother's stores, I contrived to keep my work entirely at the western corner of our farm, which was nearest to Glen Doone, and whence I could easily run to a height commanding the view I coveted

One day Squire Faggus had dropped in upon us, just in time for dinner; and very soon he and king's messenger were as thick as need be. Tom had brought his beloved mare to show her off to

Annie, and he mounted his pretty sweetheart upon her, after giving Winnie notice to be on her very best behavior.

And soon he was telling our Annie, who listened very rosily, and believed every word he said, that having been ruined in early innocence by the means of lawyers, it was only just and fair, turn for turn, that having become a match for them by long practice upon the highway, he should reinstate himself, at their expense, in society. And now he would go to London at once, and sue out his pardon; and then would his lovely darling, Annie, etc., etc.—things which I had no right to hear and in which I was not wanted. Therefore I strode away up the lane to my afternoon's employment.

I worked very hard in the copse of young ash, with my bill hook and a shearing knife; cutting out the saplings where they stooled too close together, making spars to keep for thatching, wall crooks to drive into the cob, stiles for close sheep hurdles, and handles for rakes and hoes, and two bills of the larger and straighter stuff. And all the lesser I bound in fagots, to come home on the sled to the woodrick. It is not to be supposed that I did all this work without many peeps at the seven rooks' nests, which proved my Lorna's safety. Indeed, whenever I wanted a change, either from cleaving or hewing too hard, or stooping too much at binding, I was up and away to the ridge of the hill, instead of standing and doing nothing.

Just as I was twisting the bine of my very last fagot at sundown, there came three men outside the hedge, where the western light was yellow; and by it I could see that all three of them carried firearms. These men were not walking carelessly, but following down the hedge trough, as if to stalk some enemy; and for a moment it struck me cold to think it was I they were looking for. With the swiftness of terror, I concluded that my visits to Glen Doone were known, and now my life was the forfeit.

It was a most lucky thing for me that I heard their clothes catch in the brambles and saw their hats under the rampart of ash, and lucky for me that I had the dark coppice behind me. I had no time to fly, but, with a sort of instinct, threw myself flat in among the thick fern and held my breath and lay still as a log, for I had seen the light gleam on their gun barrels. The three men came to the gap in the hedge, where I had been in and out so often, and stood up, and looked in over.

It is all very well for a man to boast that, in all his life, he has never been frightened and believes that he never could be so. There may be men of that nature—I will not dare to deny it; only I have never known them. The fright I was now in was horrible, and all my bones seemed to creep inside me; when, lying there helpless with only a billet and the comb of fern to hide me, in the dusk of early evening, I saw three faces in the gap and, what was worse, three gun muzzles.

"Somebody been at work here"—it was the deep voice of Carver Doone. "Jump up, Charlie, and look about; we must have no witnesses."

"Give me a hand behind," said Charlie, the same handsome young Doone I had seen that night; "this bank is too devilish steep for me."

"Nonsense, man!" cried Marwood de Whichehalse, who, to my amazement, was the third of the number; "only a hind cutting fagots; and, of course, he hath gone home long ago. Blindman's holiday, as we call it. I can see all over the place and there is not even a rabbit there."

At that I drew my breath again,, and was thankful I had gotten my coat on.

"Squire is right," said Charlie, who was standing up high, "there is nobody there now, captain; and lucky for the poor devil that he keepeth workman's hours. Even his chopper is gone, I see."

"No dog, no man, is the rule about here when it comes to coppice work," continued young De Whichehalse; "there is not a man would dare work there without a dog to scare the pixies."

"There is a big young fellow upon this farm," Carver Doone muttered, sulkily, "with whom I have an account to settle, if ever I come across him. He hath a cursed spite to us because we shot his father. He was going to bring the lumpers upon us, only he was afeared, last winter. And he hath been in London lately for some traitorous job, I doubt."

"Oh, you mean that fool, John Ridd," answered the young squire; "a very simple clodhopper. No treachery in him, I warrant; he hath not the head for it. All he cares about it wrestling. As strong as a bull, and with no brains."

"A bullet for that bull," said Carver; and I could see the grin on his scornful face; "a bullet for ballast to his brain, the first time I come across him."

"Nonsense, captain! I won't have him shot, for he is my old school fellow, and hath a very pretty sister. But his cousin is of a different mould, and ten times as dangerous."

"We shall see, lads, we shall see," grumbled the great, black-bearded man. "Ill bodes for the fool that would hinder me. But come, let us onward. No lingering, or the viper will be in the bush from us. Body and soul, if he give us the slip, both of you shall answer it."

"No fear, captain, and no hurry," Charlie answered gallantly; "would I were as sure of living a twelvemonth as he is of dying within the hour! Extreme unction for him in my bullet patch. Remember, I claim to be his confessor, because he hath insulted me."

"Thou art welcome to the job for me," said Marwood as they turned away and kept along the hedgerow; "I love to meet a man sword to sword; not to pop at him from a foxhole."

What answer was made I could not hear, for by this time the stout ashen hedge was between us and no other gap to be found in it, until at the very bottom, where the corner of the copse was. Yet I was not quit of danger now, for they might come through that second gap and then would be sure to see me, unless I crept into the uncut thicket before they could enter the clearing. But in spite of all my fear I was not wise enough to do that. And, in truth, the words of Carver Doone had filled me with such anger, knowing what I did about him and his pretense to Lorna, and the sight of Squire Marwood in such outrageous company had so moved my curiosity, and their threats against some unknown person so aroused my pity, that much of my prudence was forgotten, or, at least, the better part of courage, which loves danger at long distance.

Therefore, holding fast my bill hook, I dropped myself very quietly into the bed of the runnel, being resolved to take my chance of their entrance at the corner where the water dived through the hedgerow. And so I followed them down the fence, as gently as a rabbit goes: only I was inside it, and they on the outside but yet

so near that I heard the branches rustle as they pushed them.

Perhaps I had never loved ferns so much as when I came to the end of that little gully and stooped betwixt two patches of them, now my chiefest shelter, for cattle had been through the gap just there in quest of fodder and coolness, and had left but a mound of trodden earth between me and the outlaws. I mean, at least, on my left hand upon which side they were, for in front, where the brook ran out of the copse, was a good stiff hedge of holly. And now I prayed heaven to lead them straight on, for if they once turned to their right, through the gap, the muzzles of their guns would come almost against my forehead.

I heard them trampling outside the gap, uncertain which track they should follow. And in that fearful moment, with my soul almost looking out of my body, expecting notice to quit it, what do you think I did? I counted the threads in a spider's web and the flies he had lately eaten, as their skeletons shook in the twilight.

"We shall see him better in there," said Carver, in his horrible gruff voice like the creaking of the gallows' chain; "sit there, behind holly hedge, lads, while he cometh down yonder hill; and then our good evening to him; one at his body, and two at his head; and good aim, lest we balk the devil."

"I tell you, captain, that will not do," said Charlie, almost whispering; "you are very proud of your skill, we know, and can hit a lark if you see it; but he may not come till after dark, and we cannot be too nigh to him. This holly hedge is too far away. He crosses down here from Slocombslade, not from Tibbacot, I tell you; but along that track to the left there, and so by the foreland to Glenthorne, where his boat is in the cove. Do you think I have tracked him so many evenings without knowing his line to a hair? Will you fool away all my trouble?"

"Come, then, lad; we will follow thy lead. Thy life for his, if we fail of it."

"After me then, right into the hollow; thy legs are growing stiff, captain."

"So shall thy body be, young man, if thou leadest me astray in this."

I heard them stumbling down the hill, which was steep and rocky in that part; and, peering through the hedge, I saw them

enter a covert by the side of the track, which Master Stickles followed almost every evening when he left our house upon business. And then I knew who it was they were come on purpose to murder —a thing which I might have guessed long before, but for terror and cold stupidity.

"Oh, that God," I thought for a moment, waiting for my blood to flow—"oh, that God had given me brains to meet such cruel dastards according to their villany! The power to lie, and the love of it; the stealth to spy, and the glory in it; above all, the quiet relish for blood, and joy in the death of an enemy—these are what any man must have, to contend with the Doones upon even terms. And yet I thank God that I have not any of these."

It was no time to dwell upon that, only to try, if might be, to prevent the crime they were bound upon. To follow the armed men down the hill would have been certain death to me, because there was no covert there, and the last light hung upon it. It seemed to me that my only chance to stop the mischief pending was to compass the round of the hill, as fast as feet could be laid to ground; only keeping out of sight from the valley, and then down the rocks and across the brook to the track from Slocombslade, so as to stop the king's messenger from traveling any farther, if only I could catch him there.

And this was exactly what I did; and a terrible run I had for it, fearing at every step to hear the echo of shots in the valley, and dropping down the scrubby rocks with tearing and violent scratching. Then I crossed Bagworthy stream, not far below Doone valley, and breasted the hill towards Slocombslade, with my heart very heavily panting. Why Jeremy chose to ride this way, instead of the more direct one, which would have been over Oare hill, was more than I could account for; but I had nothing to do with that; all I wanted was to save his life.

And this I did by about a minute; and, which was the hardest thing of all, with a great horse pistol at my head, as I seized upon his bridle.

"Jeremy, Jerry," was all I could say, being so fearfully short of breath, for I had crossed the ground quicker than any horse could.

"Spoken just in time, John Ridd!" cried Master Stickles, still,

however, pointing the pistol at me; "I might have known thee by thy size, John. What art doing here?"

"Come to save your life. For God's sake, go no farther! Three men in the covert there, with long guns, waiting for thee."

"Ha! I have been watched of late. That is why I pointed at thee, John. Back round this corner, and get thy breath, and tell me all about it. I never saw a man so hurried. I could beat thee now, John."

Jeremy Stickles was a man of courage and presence of mind, and much resource, otherwise he would not have been appointed for this business; nevertheless he trembled greatly when he heard what I had to tell him. But I took good care to keep back the name of young Marwood de Whichehalse; neither did I show my knowledge of the other men, for reasons of my own not very hard to conjecture.

"We will let them cool their heels, John Ridd," said Jeremy, after thinking a little. "I cannot fetch my musketeers either from Glenthorne or Lynmouth, in time to seize the fellows. And three desperate Doones, well armed, are too many for you and me. One result this attempt will have, it will make us attack them sooner than we had intended. And one more it will have, good John, it will make me thy friend forever. Shake hands, my lad, and forgive me freely for having been so cold to thee. Mayhap, in the troubles coming, it will help thee not a little to have done me this good turn."

CHAPTER XXII

A TROUBLED STATE

STICKLES took me aside the next day and opened all his business to me, whether I would or not. But I gave him clearly to understand that he was not to be vexed with me, neither to regard me as in any way dishonest, if I should use for my own purpose, or for the benefit of my friends, any part of the knowledge and privity thus enforced upon me. To this he agreed quite readily, but upon the express provision that I should do nothing to thwart his schemes, neither unfold them to any one; but otherwise be allowed to act according to my own conscience and as consisted with the honor of a loyal gentleman, for so he was pleased to term me.

Now what he said lay in no great compass and may be summed in smaller still, especially as people know the chief part of it already. Disaffection to the king, or, rather, dislike to his brother James, and fear of Roman ascendency, had existed now for several years, and of late were spreading rapidly; partly through the downright arrogance of the Tory faction, the cruelty and austerity of the Duke of York, the corruption of justice, and confiscation of ancient rights and charters; partly through jealousy of the French king, and his potent voice in our affairs; and partly through that natural tide in all political channels which verily moves as if had the moon itself for its mistress. No sooner is a thing done and fixed, being set far in advance, perhaps, of all that was done before, like a new mole in the sea, but immediately the waters retire lest they should undo it; and every one says how fine it is, but leaves other people to walk on it. Then, after awhile, the vague, endless ocean, having retired and lain still without a breeze or murmur, frets and heaves again with impulse, or with lashes laid on it, and in one great surge advances over every rampart.

And so there was, at the time I speak of, a great surge in England, not rolling yet, but seething, and one which a thousand chief-justices and a million Jeremy Stickles would never be able to stop

or turn, by stringing up men in front of it; any more than a rope of onions can repulse a volcano. But the worst of it was that this great movement took a wrong channel at first, not only missing legitimate line, but roaring out that the back ditchway was the true and established course of it.

Against this rash and random current nearly all the ancient mariners of the state were set; not to allow the brave ship to drift there, though some little boats might try it. For the present there seemed to be a pause, with no open onset, but people on the shore expecting, each according to his wishes and the feel of his own finger, whence the rush of wind should come which might direct the water.

Now—to reduce high figures of speech into our own little numerals — all the towns of Somersetshire and half the towns of Devonshire were full of pushing, eager people, ready to swallow anything, or to make others swallow it. Taunton, Bridgewater, Minehead, and Dulverton took the lead of the other towns in utterance of their discontent and threats of what they meant to do if ever a Papist dared to climb the Protestant throne of England. On the other hand, the Tory leaders were not as yet under apprehension of an immediate outbreak, and feared to damage their own cause by premature coercion, for the struggle was not very likely to begin in earnest during the life of the present king; unless he should be so far emboldened as to make public profession of the faith which he held.

So the Tory policy was to watch, not, indeed, permitting their opponents to gather strength and muster in armed force or with order, but, being well apprised of all their schemes and intended movements, to wait for some bold overt act, and then to strike severely. And as a Tory watchman—or spy, as the Whigs would call him—Jeremy Stickles was now among us; and his duty was threefold.

First, and most ostensibly, to see to the levying of poundage in the little haven of Lynmouth and farther up the coast, which was now becoming a place of resort for the folk whom we call smugglers, that is to say, who land their goods without regard to king's revenue as by law established. And indeed there had been no officer appointed to take toll, until one had been sent to Mine-

head, not so very long before. The excise as well, which had been ordered in the time of the Long Parliament, had been little heeded by the people hereabouts.

Second, his duty was, though only the Doones had discovered it, to watch those outlaws narrowly, and report of their manners, doings, reputation and politics, whether true to the king and the pope, or otherwise.

Jeremy Stickles's third business was entirely political; to learn the temper of our people and the gentle families, to watch the movements of the train-bands to discover any collecting of arms and drilling of men among us, to prevent, if need were, by open force, any importation of gunpowder, of which there had been some rumor; in a word, to observe and forestall the enemy.

Now, in providing for this last-mentioned service, the government had made a great mistake, doubtless through their anxiety to escape any public attention. For all the disposable force at their emissary's command amounted to no more than a score of musketeers, and these so divided along the coast as scarcely to suffice for the duty of the sentinels. He held a commission, it is true, for the employment of the train-bands, but upon the understanding that he was not to call upon them except as a last resource for any political object; although he might use them against the Doones as private criminals, if found needful; and supposing that he could get them.

"So you see, John," he said, in conclusion, "I have more work than tools to do it with. I am heartily sorry I ever accepted such a mixed and meagre commission. At the bottom of it lies, I am well convinced, not only the desire to keep things quiet, but the paltry jealousy of the military people. Because I am not a colonel, forsooth, or a captain in his majesty's service, it would never do to trust me with a company of soldiers! And yet they would not send either colonel or captain for fear of a stir in the rustic mind. The only thing that I can do, with any chance of success, is to rout out these vile Doone fellows, and burn their houses over their heads. Now what think you of that, John Ridd?"

"Destroy the town of the Doones," I said, "and all the Doones inside it! Surely, Jeremy, you would never think of such a cruel act as that?"

"A cruel act, John! It would be a mercy for at least three counties. No doubt you folk, who live so near, are well accustomed to them, and would miss your liveliness in coming home after nightfall and the joy of finding your sheep and cattle right when you did not expect it. But after a while you might get used to the dullness of being safe in your beds. Surely, on the whole, it is as pleasant not to be robbed as to be robbed?"

"I think we should miss them very much," I answered, after consideration; for the possibility of having no Doones had never yet occurred to me, and we all were so thoroughly used to them, and allowed for it in our year's reckoning. "I am sure we should miss them very sadly; and something worse would come of it."

"Thou art the stanchest of all stanch Tories," cried Stickles, laughing, as he shook my hand; "thou believest in the divine right of robbers, who are good enough to steal thy own fat sheep. I am a jolly Tory, John; but thou art ten times jollier. Oh! the grief in thy face at the thought of being robbed no longer!"

He laughed in a very unseemly manner; while I descried nothing to laugh about. For we always like to see our way; and a sudden change upsets us. And unless it were in the loss of the farm, or the death of the king, or of Betty Muxworthy, there was nothing that could so unsettle our minds as the loss of the Doones of Bagworthy.

And besides all this I was thinking, of course, and thinking more than all the rest, about the troubles that might ensue to my own beloved Lorna. If an attack on Glen Doone were made by savage soldiers and rude train-bands, what might happen, or what might not, to my delicate, innocent darling? Therefore, when Jeremy Stickles again placed the matter before me, commending my strength and courage and skill, and finished by saying that I would be worth at least four common men to him, I cut him short as follows:

"Master Stickles, once for all, I will have nought to do with it. The reason why is no odds of thine, nor in any way disloyal. Only in thy plans remember that I will not strike a blow, neither give any counsel, neither guard any prisoners."

"Not strike a blow," cried Jeremy, "against thy father's murderers, John!"

"Not a single blow, Jeremy; unless I knew the man who did it, and he gloried in his sin. It was a foul and dastard deed, yet not done in cold blood; neither in cold blood will I take God's task of avenging it."

"Very well, John," answered Master Stickles, "I know thine obstinacy. When thy mind is made up, to argue with thee is pelting a rock with peppercorns. But thou hast some other reason, lad, unless I am much mistaken, over and above thy merciful nature and Christian forgiveness. Anyhow, come and see it, John. There will be good sport, I reckon; especially when we thrust our claws into the nest of the ravens."

"No more of this!" I answered very sternly: "it is no business of thine, Jeremy; and I will have no joking upon this matter."

"Good, my lord, so be it. But one thing I tell thee in earnest. We will have thy old double-dealing uncle, Huckaback of Dulverton, and march him first to assault Doone Castle, sure as my name is Stickles. I hear that he hath often vowed to storm the valley himself, if only he could find a dozen musketeers to back him. Now, we will give him chance to do it, and prove his loyalty to the king, which lies under some suspicion of late."

With regard to this I had nothing to say for it seemed to me very reasonable that Uncle Reuben should have first chance of recovering his stolen goods, about which he had made such a sad to-do and promised himself such vengeance. I made bold, however, to ask Master Stickles at what time he intended to carry out this great and hazardous attempt. He answered that he had several things requiring first to be set in order, and that he must make an inland journey, even as far as Tiverton, and perhaps Crediton and Exeter, to collect his forces and ammunition for them. For he meant to have some of the yeomanry as well as of the train-bands, so that if the Doones should sally forth, as perhaps they would, on horseback, cavalry might be there to meet them and cut them off from returning.

All this made me very uncomfortable, for many and many reasons, the chief and foremost being, of course, my anxiety about Lorna. If the attack succeeded, what was to become of her? Who would rescue her from the brutal soldiers, even supposing that she escaped from the hands of her own people, during the danger and

ferocity? And in smaller ways I was much put out; for instance, who would insure our cornricks, sheep, and cattle, hay, and even our fat pigs, now coming on for bacon, against the spreading all over the country of unlicensed marauders?

In another way I was vexed, for, after all, we must consider the opinions of our neighbors. I knew quite well how everybody for ten miles round, for my fame must have been at least that wide, after all my wrestling, would lift up hands and cry out thus—"Black shame on John Ridd, if he lets them go without him!"

Putting all these things together, as well as many others,which your own wits will suggest to you, it is impossible but what you will freely acknowledge that this unfortunate John Ridd was now in a cloven stick. There was Lorna, my love and life, bound by her duty to that old vil— nay, I mean to her good grandfather, who could now do little mischief, and therefore deserved all praise—Lorna bound, at any rate, by her womanly feelings, if not by sense of duty, to remain in the thick of danger, with nobody to protect her, but everybody to covet her for beauty and position.

Here was all the country roused with violent excitement at the chance of snapping at the Doones and not only getting tit for tat, but every young man promising his sweetheart a gold chain, and his mother at least a shilling. And here was our own mow-yard, better filled than we could remember, and perhaps every sheaf in it destined to be burned or stolen, before we had finished the bread we had baked.

Among all these troubles, there was, however, or seemed to be, one comfort. Tom Faggus returned from London very proudly and very happily, with a royal pardon in black and white, which everybody admired the more, because no one could read a word of it.

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO FOOLS TOGETHER

WHEN I went up one morning to look for my seven rooks' nests, behold, there were but six to be seen, for the topmost of them all, and the most conspicuous was gone. I looked, and looked, and rubbed my eyes, and turned to try them by other sights, and then I looked again; yes, there could be no doubt about it, the signal was made for me to come because my love was in danger. For me to enter the valley now, during the broad daylight, could have brought no comfort, but only harm to the maiden and certain death to myself. Yet it was more than I could do to keep altogether at distance; therefore I ran to the nearest place where I could remain unseen, and watched the glen from the wooded height for hours and hours, impatiently.

However, no impatience of mine made any difference in the scene upon which I was gazing. In the part of the valley which I could see there was nothing moving except the water and a few stolen cows, going sadly along as if knowing that they had no honest right there. It sank very heavily into my heart, with all the beds of dead leaves around it, and there was nothing I cared to do except blow on my fingers and long for more wit.

It was lucky for me, while I waited here, that our very best sheep-dog, old Watch, had chosen to accompany me that day. For otherwise I must have had no dinner, being unpersuaded, even by that, to quit my survey of the valley. However, by aid of poor Watch I contrived to obtain a supply of food, for I sent him home with a note to Annie fastened upon his chest; and in less than an hour back he came, proud enough to wag his tail off, with his tongue hanging out from the speed of his journey, and a large lump of bread and of bacon fastened in a napkin around his neck. I had not told my sister, of course, what was toward; for why should I make her anxious?

When it grew towards dark, I was just beginning to prepare

for my circuit around the hills; but suddenly Watch gave a long low growl; I kept myself close as possible, and ordered the dog to be silent, and presently saw a short figure approaching from a thickly wooded hollow on the left side of my hiding-place. It was the same figure I had seen once before in the moonlight at Plover's Barrows; and proved, to my great delight, to be the little maid, Gwenny Carfax. She started a moment at seeing me, but more with surprise than fear; and then she laid both her hands upon mine, as if she had known me for twenty years.

"Young man," she said, "you must come with me. I was gwain' all the way to fetch thee. Old man be dying; and he can't die, or at least he won't, without first considering thee."

"Considering me!" I cried: "what can Sir Ensor Doone want with considering me? Has Mistress Lorna told him?"

"All concerning thee and thy doings when she knowed old man were so near his end. That vexed he was about thy low blood, a' thought he would come to life again, on purpose for to bate 'ee. But after all, there can't be scarcely such bad luck as that. Now, if he strook thee, thou must take it; there be no denaying of 'un. Fire I have seen afore, hot and red, and raging; but I never seen cold fire afore, and it maketh me burn and shiver."

I sent Watch home and followed Gwenny, who led me along very rapidly with her short, broad form gliding down the hollow from which she had first appeared. Here at the bottom she entered a thicket of gray ash stubs and black holly, with rocks around it gnarled with roots, and hung with masks of ivy. Here, in a dark and lonely corner, with a pixy ring before it, she came to a narrow door, very brown and solid, looking like a trunk of wood at a little distance. This she opened, without a key, by stooping down and pressing it where the threshold met the jamb; and then she ran in very nimbly, but I was forced to be bent in two and even so without comfort. The passage was close and difficult and as dark as any black pitch, but it was not long, be it as it might, and in that there was some comfort. We came out soon at the other end, and were at the top of Doone valley.

In the chilly dusk air it looked most untempting, especially during that state of mind under which I was laboring. As we crossed towards the captain's house we met a couple of great

Our very best sheep-dog, Old Watch, had chosen to accompany me that day.

Doones lounging by the water-side. Gwenny said something to them, and although they stared very hard at me, they let me pass without hindrance. It is not too much to say that when the little maid opened Sir Ensor's door my heart thumped, quite as much with terror as with hope of Lorna's presence.

But in a moment the fear was gone, for Lorna was trembling in my arms, and my courage rose to comfort her.

She led me into a cold, dark room, rough and very gloomy, although with two candles burning. I took little heed of the things in it, though I marked that the window was open. That which I heeded was an old man, very stern and comely, with death upon his countenance; yet not lying in his bed, but set upright in a chair, with a loose red cloak thrown over him. Upon this his white hair fell, and his pallid fingers lay in a ghastly fashion, without a sign of life or movement, or of the power that kept him up all rigid, calm, and relentless. Only in his great black eyes, fixed upon me solemnly, all the power of his body dwelt, all the life of his soul was burning.

I could not look at him very nicely, being afraid of the death in his face, and most afraid to show it. And to tell the truth, my poor blue eyes fell away from the blackness of his as if it had been my coffin-plate. Therefore I made a low obeisance, and tried not to shiver. Only I groaned that Lorna thought it good manners to leave us two together.

"Ah," said the old man, and his voice seemed to come from a cavern of skeletons; "are you that great John Ridd?"

"John Ridd is my name, your honor," was all that I could answer; "and I hope your worship is better."

"Child, have you sense enough to know what you have been doing?"

"Yes, I know right well," I answered, "that I have set mine eyes far above my rank."

"Are you ignorant that Lorna Doone is born of the oldest families remaining in North Europe?"

"I was ignorant of that, your worship; yet I knew of her high descent from the Doones of Bagworthy."

"And know you of your own low descent from the Ridds, of Oare?"

"Sir," I answered, being as yet unaccustomed to this style of speech, "the Ridds, of Oare, have been honest men twice as long as the Doones have been rogues."

"I would not answer for that, John," Sir Ensor replied, very quietly, when I expected fury. "If it be so, thy family is the very oldest in Europe. Now hearken to me, boy, or clown, or honest fool, or whatever thou art; hearken to an old man's words, who has not many hours to live. I forbid you ever to see that foolish child again. You will pledge your word in Lorna's presence never to see or to seek her again; never even to think of her more. Now call her, for I am weary."

He kept his great eyes fixed upon me with their icy fire and pointed to the door. Although my heart rebelled and kindled at his proud disdain, I could not disobey him freely; but made a low salute, and went straightway in search of Lorna.

Lorna Doone was crying softly in a little window, and listening to the river's grief. I laid my heavy arm around her, not with any air of claiming or of forcing her thoughts to me, but only just to comfort her, and ask what she was thinking of. To my arm she made no answer, neither to my seeking eyes; but to my heart, once for all, she spoke with her own upon it. Not a word nor sound between us; not even a kiss was interchanged; but man or maid who has ever loved hath learned our understanding.

Therefore it came to pass that we saw fit to enter Sir Ensor's room in the following manner. Lorna, with her right hand swallowed entirely by the palm of mine, and her waist retired from view by means of my left arm. All one side of her hair came down, in a way to be remembered, upon the left and fairest part of my favorite otter-skin waistcoat; and her head as well would have lain there doubtless, but for the danger of walking so. I, for my part, was too far gone to lag behind in the matter, but carried my love bravely, fearing neither death nor hell while she abode beside me.

Old Sir Ensor looked much astonished. For forty years he had been obeyed and feared by all around him; and he knew that I feared him vastly, before I got hold of Lorna. And, indeed, I was still afraid of him; only for loving Lorna so, and having to protect her.

Then I made him a bow, to the very best of all I had learned

both at Tiverton, and in London; after that I waited for him to begin, as became his age and rank in life.

"Ye two fools!" he said at last, with a depth of contempt which no words may express: "ye two fools."

"May it please your worship," I answered softly, "maybe we are not such fools as we look. But though we be, we are well content, so long as we may be two fools together."

"Why, John," said the old man, with a spark as of smiling in his eyes; "thou art not altogether the clumsy yokel and the clod I took thee for."

"Oh, no, grandfather; oh, dear grandfather," cried Lorna, with such zeal and flashing that her hands went forward; "nobody knows what John Ridd is, because he is so modest. I mean nobody except me, dear." And here she turned to me again, and rose upon tip-toe, and kissed me.

"I have seen a little of the world," said the old man, while I was half ashamed, although so proud of Lorna; "but this is beyond all I have seen, and nearly all I have heard of. It is more fit for southern climates than for the fogs of Exmoor."

"It is fit for all the world, your worship, with your honor's good leave and will," I answered in humility, being still ashamed of it; "when it happens so to people there is nothing that can stop it, sir."

An hour or two ere the old man died, when only we two were with him, he looked at us both very dimly and softly, as if he wished to do something for us, but had left it now too late. Lorna hoped that he wanted to bless us but he only frowned at that, and let his hand drop downward, and crooked one knotted finger.

"He wants something out of the bed, dear," Lorna whispered to me; "see what it is, upon your side, there."

I followed the bent of his poor shrunken hand and sought among the pilings; and there I felt something hard and sharp, and drew it forth and gave it to him. It flashed like the spray of a fountain upon us in the dark winter of the room. He could not take it in his hand, but let it hang, as daisies do; only making Lorna see that he meant her to have it.

"Why, it is my glass necklace!" Lorna cried in great surprise; "my necklace he always promised me and from which you have

got the ring, John. But grandfather kept it, because the children wanted to pull it from my neck. May I have it now, dear grandfather? Not unless you wish, dear."

Darling Lorna wept again, because the old man could not tell her, except by one very feeble nod, that she was doing what he wished. Then she gave me the trinket for the sake of safety, and I stowed it in my breast. He seemed to me to follow this, and to be well content with it.

After all was over, I strode home across the moors.

CHAPTER XXIV

NOT TOO SOON

IT was a great winter. All our house was quite snowed up, except where we had purged away by dint of constant shovellings. The kitchen was as dark and darker than the cider-cellar, and long lines of furrowed scallops ran even up to the chimney-stacks. Several windows fell right inwards through the weight of the snow against them, and the few that stood bulged in, and bent, like an old, bruised lanthorn. We were obliged to cook by candlelight; we were forced to read by candle-light; as for baking, we could not do it, because the oven was too chill, and a load of fagots only brought a little wet down the sides of it.

And this, I say, was the smallest thing, for it was far more serious that we were losing half our stock, do all we would to shelter them. Even the horses in the stables, mustered all together for the sake of breath and steaming, had long icicles from their muzzles almost every morning. But of all things, the very gravest, to my apprehension, was the impossibility of hearing, or having any token, of or from my loved one.

Therefore I fell to work at once, upon a hint from Lizzie, and—being used to thatching-work, and the making of traps, and so on—before very long I built myself a pair of strong and light snow-shoes, framed with ash and ribbed of withy, with half-tanned calf-skin stretched across, and an inner-sole to support my feet. At first I could not walk at all, but floundered about most piteously, catching one shoe in the other, and both of them in the snow-drifts, to the great amusement of the girls, who were come to look at me. But after a while I grew more expert, discovering what my errors were, and altering the inclination of the shoes themselves, according to a print which Lizzie found in a book of adventures. And this made such a difference that I crossed the farm-

yard and came back again without so much as falling once, or getting my staff entangled.

Then I started across the hills and valleys on my snow shoes toward the Doone Glen.

If Lorna had looked out of the window, she would not have known me with those boots upon my feet and a well-cleaned sheepskin over me, bearing my own J. R. in red just between my shoulders, but covered now in snowflakes. The house was partly drifted up, though not so much as ours was, and I crossed the little stream almost without knowing that it was under me. At first, being pretty safe against interference from the other huts by virtue of the blinding snow and the difficulty of walking, I examined all the windows; but these were coated so with ice, like ferns and flowers and dazzling stars, that no one could so much as guess what might be inside of them.

I was forced to venture to the door and knock in a hesitating manner, not being sure but what my answer might be the mouth of a carbine. However it was not so, for I heard a pattering of feet and a whispering going on, and then a shrill voice through the keyhole, asking, "Who's there?"

"Only me, John Ridd," I answered; upon which I heard a little laughter and a little sobbing, or something that was like it; and then the door was opened about a couple of inches, with a bar behind it still; and then the little voice went on.

"Put thy finger in, young man, with the old ring on it. But mind thee, if it be the wrong one, thou shalt never draw it back again."

Laughing at Gwenny's mighty threat, I showed my finger in the opening; upon which she let me in, and barred the door again like lightning.

"What is the meaning of all this, Gwenny?" I asked, as I slipped about on the floor, for I could not stand there firmly with my great snow-shoes on.

"Maning enough, and bad maning, too," the Cornish girl made answer. "Us be shut in here, and starving, and dursn't let anybody in upon us. I wish thou were good to ate, young man: I could manage most of thee."

I was so frightened by her eyes, full of wolfish hunger, that

I could only say, "Good God!" having never seen the like before. Then drew I forth a large piece of bread, which I had brought in case of accidents, and placed it in her hands. She leaped at it, as a starving dog leaps at sight of his supper, and she set her teeth in it, and then withheld it from her lips with something very like an oath at her own vile greediness; and then away round the corner with it, no doubt for her young mistress. I, meanwhile, was occupied to the best of my ability in taking my snow shoes off, yet wondering much within myself why Lorna did not come to me.

But presently I knew the cause, for Gwenny called me, and I ran, and found my darling quite unable to say so much as "John, how are you?" Between the hunger, and the cold, and the excitement of my coming, she had fainted away, and lay back on a chair as white as the snow around us. In betwixt her delicate lips Gwenny was thrusting with all her strength the hard brown crust of the rye bread which she had snatched from me so.

"Get water or get snow," I said, "don't you know what fainting is, you very stupid child?"

"Never heered on it in Carnwall," she answered trusting still to the bread; "be un the same as bleeding?"

"It will be directly, if you go on squeezing away with that crust so. Eat a piece; I have got some more. Leave my darling now to me."

Hearing that I had some more, the starving girl could resist no longer, but tore it in two and had swallowed half before I had coaxed my Lorna back to sense, and hope, and joy, and love.

"I never expected to see you again. I had made up my mind to die, John; and to die without you knowing it."

She gave me one little shrunken hand, and I could not help a tear for it.

"After all, Mistress Lorna," I said, pretending to be gay, for a smile might do her good; "you do not love me as Gwenny does, for she even wanted to eat me."

"And shall, afore I have done, young man," Gwenny answered, laughing; "you come in here with thy red chakes and make us think o' sirloin."

"Eat up your bit of brown bread, Gwenny. It is not good enough for your mistress. Bless her heart, I have something here

such as she never tasted the like of, being in such appetite. Look here, Lorna; smell it first. I have had it ever since Twelfth-day, and kept it all the time for you. Annie made it. That is enough to warrant it good cooking."

And then I showed a great mince-pie in a bag of tissue paper, and told them how the mince-meat was made of golden pippins, finely shred, with the undercut of the silroin, and spice and fruit accordingly and far beyond my knowledge. But Lorna would not touch a morsel until she had thanked God for it, and given me the kindest kiss, and put a piece in Gwenny's mouth.

I never did enjoy a thing that had found its way between my own lips, half or even a quarter as much as I now enjoyed beholding Lorna, sitting proudly upwards, entering into that mince-pie and moving all her pearls of teeth exactly as I told her. For I was afraid lest she should be too fast in going through it and cause herself more damage so than she got of nourishment.

And then I begged to know the meaning of this state of things.

"The meaning is sad enough," said Lorna; "and I see no way out of it. We are both to be starved until I let them do what they like with me."

"That is to say, until you choose to marry Carver Doone and be slowly killed by him."

"Slowly! No, John, quickly. I hate him so intensely that less than a week would kill me."

"Not a doubt of that," said Gwenny; "oh, she hates him nicely, then; but not half so much as I do."

I told them both that this state of things could be endured no longer; on which point they agreed with me, but saw no means to help it. For even if Lorna could make up her mind to come away with me and live at Plover's Barrows farm under my good mother's care, as I had urged so often, behold, the snow was all around us, heaped as high as mountains, and how could any delicate maiden ever get across it?

Then I spoke, with a strange tingle upon both sides of my heart, knowing that this undertaking was a serious one for all, and might burn our farm down.

"If I warrant to take you safe, and without much fright or hardship, Lorna, will you come with me?"

"To be sure I will, dear," said my beauty, with a smile and a glance to follow it; "I have small alternative, to starve or go with you John."

"Gwenny, have you courage for it? Will you come with your young mistress?"

"Will I stay behind?" cried Gwenny in a voice that settled it. And so we began to arrange about it; and I was much excited. It was useless now to leave it longer; if it could be done at all, it could not be too quickly done. It was the Counsellor who had ordered, after all other schemes had failed, that his niece should have no food until she would obey him. He had strictly watched the house, taking turns with Carver, to insure that none came nigh it bearing food or comfort. But this evening they had thought it needless to remain on guard; and it would have been impossible, because they themselves were busy offering high festival to all the valley in right of their own commandership.

Suddenly I saw, far down the stream, a little form of fire arising, red and dark and flickering. Presently it caught on something and went upward boldly, and then it struck into many forks, and then it fell and rose again.

"Do you know what all that is, John?" asked Lorna. "The Doones are firing Dunkery beacon to celebrate their new captain."

"But how could they bring it here, through the snow? If they have sledges, I can do nothing."

"They brought it before the snow began. The moment poor grandfather was gone, the young men, having none to check them, began at once upon it. They had always borne a grudge against it; not that it ever did them harm, but because it seemed so insolent. 'Can't a gentleman go home, without a smoke behind him?' I have often heard them saying. And though they have done it no serious harm, since they threw the firemen on the fire, many, many years ago, they have often promised to bring it here for their candle; and now they have done it. Ah, now look! The tar is kindled."

Though Lorna took it so in joke, I looked upon it very gravely, knowing that this heavy outrage to the feelings of the neighborhood would cause more stir than a hundred sheep stolen, or a score of houses sacked.

However, in spite of all my regrets the fire went up merrily, blazing red and white and yellow, as it leaped on different things. And the light danced on the snow drifts with a misty lilac hue. I was atonished at its burning in such mighty depths of snow; but Gwenny said that the wicked man had been three days hard at work, clearing, as it were, a cockpit for their fire to have its way. And now they had a mighty pile, which must have covered five land-yards square, heaped up to a goodly height, and eager to take fire.

In this I saw great obstacle to what I wished to manage. For when this pyramid should be kindled thoroughly and pouring light and blazes round, would not all the valley be like a white room full of candles? Thinking thus, I was half inclined to abide my time for another night; and then my sceond thoughts convinced me that I would be a fool in this. For lo, what an opportunity! All the Doones would be drunk, of course, in about three hours' time, and getting more and more in drink as the night went on. As for the fire, it must sink in about three hours or more, and only cast uncertain shadows friendly to my purpose. And then the outlaws must cower round it, as the cold increased on them, helping the weight of the liquor; and in their jollity any noise would be cheered as a false alarm.

This thought quickened me so much that I touched my darling reverently, and told her in a few short words how I hoped to manage it.

"Sweetest, in two hours' time I shall be again with you. Keep the bar up, and have Gwenny ready to answer any one. You are safe while they are dining, dear and drinking healths, and all that stuff; and before they have done with that, I shall be again with you. Have everything you care to take in a very little compass; and Gwenny must have no baggage. I shall knock loud, and then wait a little; and then knock twice, very softly."

With this I folded her in my arms, and she looked frightened at me, not having perceived her danger; and then I told Gwenny over again what I had told her mistress, but she only nodded her head and said, "Young man, go and teach thy grandmother."

CHAPTER XXV

BROUGHT HOME AT LAST

I HASTENED home at my utmost speed, and told my mother to keep the house up till my return, and to have plenty of fire blazing, and plenty of water boiling, and food enough hot for a dozen people, and the best bed aired with the warming-pan. Dear mother smiled softly at my excitement, though her own was not much less, I am sure, and enhanced by sore anxiety. Then I gave very strict directions to Annie, and praised her a little, and kissed her; and I even endeavoured to flatter Eliza, lest she should be disagreeable.

After this I took some brandy, in fear of whatever might happen in such great cold to my comrades. Also I carried some other provisions, grieving much at their coldness; and then I went to the upper linhay and took our new light pony-sled, which had been made almost as much for pleasure as for business; though I never understood how our girls could have found any pleasure in bumping along so. On the snow, however, it ran as sweetly as if it had been made for it, yet I durst not take the pony with it; in the first place, because his hoofs would break through the ever-shifting surface of the light and piling snow; and secondly, because those ponies, coming from the forest, have a dreadful trick of neighing, and most of all in frosty weather.

Therefore I girded my own body with a dozen turns of hay-rope, twisting both the ends in under at the bottom of my breast, and winding the hay on the skew a little, that the hempen thong might not slip between, and so cut me in the drawing. I put a good piece of spare rope in the sled, and the cross seat with the back to it—which was stuffed with our own wool—as well as two or three fur coats, and then, just as I was starting, out came Annie, in spite of the cold, panting for fear of missing me, and with nothing on her head, but a lanthorn in one hand.

"Oh, John, here is the most wonderful thing! Mother has never shown it before; and I can't think how she could make up

her mind. She had it hidden in a great well of a cupboard with camphor, and spirits, and lavender. Lizzie says it is a most magnificent sealskin cloak, worth fifty pounds, or a farthing."

"At any rate it is soft and warm," said I, very calmly flinging it into the bottom of the sled. "Tell mother I will put it over Lorna's feet."

"Lorna's feet! Oh, you great fool," cried Annie, for the first time reviling me; "over her shoulders; and be proud, you very stupid John."

"It is not good enough for her feet," I answered, with strong emphasis; "but don't tell mother I said so, Annie. Only thank her very kindly."

With that I drew my traces hard, and set my ashen staff into the snow, and struck out with my best foot foremost, the best one at snow shoes I mean, and the sled came after me as lightly as a dog might follow; and Annie with the lanthorn, seemed to be left behind and waiting, like a pretty lamp post.

I went on quietly, and at a very tidy speed; being only too thankful that the snow had ceased, and no wind as yet arisen. And from the ring of low white vapor girding all the verge of sky, and from the rosy blue above, and the shafts of starlight set upon a quivering bow, as well as from the moon itself and the light behind it, having learned the signs of frost from its bitter twinges, I knew that we should have a night as keen as ever England felt. Nevertheless, I had work enough to keep me warm if I managed it. The question was, could I contrive to save my darling from it?

Daring not to risk my sled by any fall from the valley cliffs, I dragged it very carefully up the steep incline of ice, through the narrow chasm, and so to the very brink and verge where first I had seen my Lorna in the fishing days of boyhood. As then I had a trident fork for sticking of the loaches, so now I had a strong ash stake to lay across from rock to rock and break the speed of descending. With this I moored the sled quite safe at the very lip of the chasm, where all was now substantial ice, green and black in the moonlight; and then I set off up the valley, skirting along one side of it.

The stack fire still was burning strongly, but with more of heat than blaze; and many of the younger Doones were playing

on the verge of it, the children making rings of fire, and their mothers watching them. All the grave and reverend warriors, having heard of rheumatism, were inside of log and stone, in the two lowest houses, with enough of candles burning to make our list of sheep come short.

All these I passed without the smallest risk or difficulty, walking up the channel of drift which I spoke of once before. And then I crossed, with more of care, and to the door of Lorna's house, and made the sign and listened, after taking my snow shoes off.

But no one came, as I expected, neither could I spy a light. And I seemed to hear a faint, low sound, like the moaning of the snow-wind. Then I knocked again more loudly, with a knocking at my heart; and, receiving no answer, set all my power at once against the door. In a moment it flew inwards, and I glided along the passage with my feet still slippery. There, in Lorna's room, I saw, by the moonlight flowing in, a sight which drove me beyond sense.

Lorna was behind a chair, crouching in the corner with her hands up, and a crucifix, or something that looked like it. In the middle of the room lay Gwenny Carfax, stupid, yet with one hand clutching the ankle of a struggling man. Another man stood above my Lorna, trying to draw the chair away. In a moment I had him round the waist, and he went out of the window with a mighty crash of glass; luckily for him, that window had no bars, like some of them. Then I took the other man by the neck; and he could not plead for mercy. I bore him out of the house as lightly as I would bear a baby, yet squeezing his throat a little more than I fain would do to an infant. By the bright moonlight I saw that I carried Marwood de Whichehalse. For his father's sake I spared him, and because he had been my school fellow; but with every muscle of my body strung with indignation, I cast him, like a skittle, from me into a snowdrift, which closed over him. Then I looked for the other fellow, tossed through Lorna's window; and found him lying stunned and bleeding, neither able to groan yet—Charleworth Doone, if his gushing blood did not much mislead me.

It was no time to linger now. I fastened my shoes in a moment, and caught up my own darling with her head upon my

shoulder, where she whispered faintly; and telling Gwenny to follow me, or else I would come back for her, if she could not walk the snow, I ran the whole distance to my sled, caring not who might follow me. Then by the time I had set up Lorna, beautiful and smiling, with the sealskin cloak all over her, sturdy Gwenny came along, having trudged in the track of my snow shoes, although with two bags on her back. I set her in beside her mistress, to support her, and keep warm; and then, with one look back at the glen, which had been so long my home of heart, I hung behind the sled, and launched it down the steep and dangerous way.

Though the cliffs were black above us, and the road unseen in front, and a great white grave of snow might at a single word come down, Lorna was as calm and happy as an infant in its bed. She knew that I was with her; and when I told her not to speak, she touched my hand in silence. Gwenny was in a much greater fright, having never seen such a thing before. I could hardly keep her quiet without making a noise myself. With my staff from rock to rock and my weight thrown backward, I broke the sled's too rapid way, and brought my grown love safely out, by the self-same road which first had led me to her girlish fancy, and my boyish slavery.

Unpursued, yet looking back as if some one must be after us, we skirted beyond the black, whirling pool and gained the meadows beyond it. Here there was hard collar work, the track being all uphill and rough; and Gwenny wanted to jump out to lighten the sled, and to push behind. But I would not hear of it, because it was now so deadly cold and I feared that Lorna might get frozen without having Gwenny to keep her warm. And, after all, it was the sweetest labor I had ever known in all my life, to feel that I was pulling Lorna, and pulling her to our own farm house.

Gwenny's nose was touched with frost before we had gone much farther, because she would not keep it quiet and snug beneath the sealskin. And here I had to stop in the moonlight, and rub it with a clove of snow, as Eliza had taught me; and Gwenny scolding all the time as if myself had frozen it. Lorna was now so far oppressed with all the troubles of the evening, and the joy that followed them, as well as by the piercing cold and difficulty of

It was the sweetest labor — pulling Lorna to our own farmhouse.

—Page 158

breathing, that she lay quite motionless like fairest wax in the moonlight—when we stole a glance at her, beneath the dark folds of the cloak; and I thought that she was falling into the heavy snow sleep, when there is no awaking.

Therefore I drew my traces tight, and set my whole strength to the business; and we slipped along at a merry pace, although with many joltings, which must have sent my darling out into the cold snow drifts but for the short, strong arm of Gwenny. And so, in about an hour's time, in spite of many hindrances, we came home to the old courtyard, and all the dogs saluted us. My heart was quivering, and my cheeks as hot as the Doones' bonfire with wondering both what Lorna would think of our farmyard, and what my mother would think of her. Upon the former subject my anxiety was wasted, for Lorna neither saw a thing, nor even opened her heavy eyes. And as to what mother would think of her, she was certain not to think at all, until she had cried over her.

And so indeed it came to pass. Even at this length of time I can hardly tell it, although so bright before my mind, because it moves my heart so. The sled was at the open door, with only Lorna in it, for Gwenny Carfax had jumped out and hung back in the clearing, giving any reason rather than the only true one—that she would not be intruding. At the door were all our people; first, of course, Betty Muxworthy, teaching me how to draw the sled, as if she had been born in it, and flourishing with a great broom, wherever a speck of snow lay. Then dear Annie, and behind them mother, looking as if she wanted to come first, but doubted how the manners lay. In the distance Lizzie stood, fearful of encouraging, but unable to keep out of it.

Betty was going to poke her broom right in under the sealskin cloak, where Lorna lay unconscious, and where her precious breath hung frozen, like a silver cobweb; but I caught it up and flung it clean away over the corn chamber; and then I put the others by, and fetched my mother forward.

"You shall see her first," I said; "is she not your daughter? Hold the light there, Annie."

Dear mother's hands were quick and trembling as she opened the shining folds; and there she saw my Lorna sleeping, with her black hair all dishevelled, and she bent and kissed her forehead,

and only said, "God bless her, John!" And then she was taken with violent weeping, and I was forced to hold her.

They carried her into the house, Betty chattering all the while and going on now about Lorna's hands, and the others crowding round her, so that I thought I was not wanted among so many women, and should only get the worst of it, and perhaps do harm to my darling. Therefore I went and brought Gwenny in, and gave her a potful of bacon and peas and an iron spoon to eat it with, which she did right heartily.

Then I asked her how she could have been such a fool as to let those two vile fellows enter the house where Lorna was; and she accounted for it so naturally that I could only blame myself. For my agreement had been to give one loud knock and after that two little knocks. Well, these two drunken rogues had come; and one, being very drunk indeed, had given a great thump; and then nothing more to do with it; and the other, being three-quarters drunk, had followed his leader but feebly, and making two of it. Whereupon up jumped Lorna, and declared that her John was there.

All this Gwenny told me shortly, between the whiles of eating, and even while she licked the spoon; and then there came a message for me that my love was sensible, and was seeking all around for me. So I went to see my dear.

That sight I shall not forget till my dying head falls back and my breast can lift no more. I know not whether I were then more blessed or harrowed by it. For in the settle was my Lorna, propped with pillows round her, and her clear hands spread sometimes to the blazing fireplace. In her eyes no knowledge was of anything around her, neither in her neck the sense of leaning towards anything. Only both her lovely hands were entreating something to spare her, or to love her; and the lines of supplication quivered in her sad white face.

"All go away, except my mother," I said very quietly, but so that I would be obeyed; and everybody knew it. Then mother came to me alone; and she said, "The frost is in her brain; I have heard of this before, John." "Mother, I will have it out," was all that I could answer her; "leave her to me altogether; only you sit there and watch." For I felt that Lorna knew me, and no other

"All go away, except my mother," I said very quietly.

Page 160

soul but me; and that if not interfered with, she would soon come home to me. Therefore I sat gently by her, leaving nature, as it were, to her own good time and will.

And presently the glance that watched me, as at distance and in doubt, began to flutter and to brighten, and to deepen into kindness, then to beam with trust and love, and then with gathering tears to falter, and in shame to turn away. But the small entreating hands found their way, as if by instinct, to my great protecting palms; and trembled there, and rested there.

For a little while we lingered thus, neither wishing to move away, neither caring to look beyond the presence of the other; both alike so full of hope and comfort and true happiness; if only the world would let us be. And then a little sob disturbed us, and mother tried to make believe that she was only coughing. But Lorna, guessing who she was, jumped up so very rashly that she almost set her frock on fire from the great ash log; and away she ran to the old oak chair where mother was by the clock case pretending to be knitting, and she took the work from mother's hands, and laid them both upon her head, kneeling humbly, and looking up.

"God bless you, my fair mistress!" said mother, bending nearer, and then as Lorna's gaze prevailed, "God bless you, my sweet child!"

And so she went to mother's heart by the very nearest road, even as she had come to mine; I mean the road of pity, smoothed by grace and youth and gentleness.

CHAPTER XXVI

SQUIRE FAGGUS MAKES SOME LUCKY HITS

JEREMY STICKLES was gone south, ere ever the frost set in, for the purpose of mustering forces to attack the Doone Glen. But of course this weather had put a stop to every kind of movement; for even if men could have borne the cold, they could scarcely be brought to face the perils of the snow drifts. And, to tell the truth, I cared not how long this weather lasted, so long as we had enough to eat and could keep ourselves from freezing. Not only that I did not want Master Stickles back again, to make more disturbances; but also that the Doones could not come prowling after Lorna while the snow lay piled between us, with surface soft and dry.

Of course they would very soon discover where their lawful queen was, although the track of sled and snow shoes had been quite obliterated by another snow fall before the revellers could have grown half as drunk as they intended. But Marwood de Whichehalse, who had been snowed up among them, as Gwenny said, after helping to strip the beacon, that young squire was almost certain to have recognized me, and to have told vile Carver. And it gave me no little pleasure to think how mad Carver must be with me for robbing him of the lovely bride whom he was starving into matrimony. However, I was not pleased at all with the prospect of the consequences; but set all hands on to thresh the corn ere the Doones could come and burn the ricks. For I knew that they could not come yet, inasmuch as even a forest pony could not traverse the country, much less the heavy horses needed to carry such men as they were. And hundreds of the forest ponies died in this hard winter, some being buried in the snow, and more of them starved for want of grass.

Lorna had so won us all by her kind and gentle ways and her mode of hearkening to everybody's trouble and replying without words, as well as by her beauty, and simple grace of all things, that

I could almost wish, sometimes, the rest would leave her more to me. But mother could not do enough; and Annie almost worshipped her; and even Lizzie could not keep her bitterness towards her, especially when she found that Lorna knew as much of books as need be.

And the worst of it was that Lorna took the strangest of all strange fancies for our kitchen, and it was hard to keep her out of it. Not that she had any special bent for cooking as our Annie had; rather, indeed, the contrary, for she liked to have her food ready cooked, but that she loved the look of the place, and the cheerful fire burning, and the racks of bacon to be seen, and the richness, and the homeliness, and the pleasant smell of everything.

Therefore, if you wanted Lorna, as I was always sure to do, the very surest place to find her was our own old kitchen. Not gossiping, I mean, nor loitering, neither seeking into things; but seeming to be quite at home, as if she had known it from a child, and seeming to light it up, and make life and color out of all the dullness as I have seen the breaking sun do among brown shocks of wheat.

Although it was the longest winter ever known in our parts, never having ceased to freeze for a single night, and scarcely for a single day, from the middle of December till the second week in March, to me it was the very shortest and the most delicious; and verily I do believe it was the same to Lorna.

It was now high time to work very hard, both to make up for the farm-work lost during the months of frost and snow, and also to be ready for a great and vicious attack from the Doones, who would burn us in our beds at the earliest opportunity.

As for Lorna, she would come out. There was no keeping her in the house. She had taken up some peculiar notion that we were doing more for her than she had any right to, and that she must earn her living by the hard work of her hands. It was quite in vain to tell her that she was expected to do nothing, and far worse than vain, for it made her cry sadly if any one assured her that she could do no good at all. She even began upon mother's garden before the snow was clean gone from it, and sowed a beautiful row of peas, every one of which the mice ate.

Now in spite of the floods and the sloughs being out, and the

state of the roads most perilous, Squire Faggus came at last, riding his famous strawberry mare. There was a great ado between him and Annie, as you may well suppose, after some four months of parting. And so we left them alone a while to coddle over their raptures. But when they were tired of that, or, at least, had time enough to be so, mother and I went in to know what news Tom had brought with him. Though he did not seem to want us yet, he made himself agreeable, and so we sent Annie to cook the dinner while her sweetheart should tell us everything.

Tom Faggus had very good news to tell, and he told it with such force of expression as made us laugh very heartily. He had taken up the purchase of a nice bit of land to the south of the moors and in the parish of Molland. It is true that the land was poor and wild and the soil exceeding shallow, lying on the slope of rock, and burned up in hot summers. But with us hot summers are things known by tradition only; we generally have more moisture, especially in July, than we well know what to do with, and this farm of Squire Faggus, as he truly now had a right to be called, was of the very finest pasture when it got good store of rain. And Tom, who had ridden the Devonshire roads with many a reeking jacket, knew right well that he might trust the climate for that matter.

Being such a hand as he was at making the most of everything, both his own and other people's, he had actually turned to his own advantage that extraordinary weather which had so impoverished every one around him. For he taught his Winnie to go forth in the snowy evenings when horses are seeking everywhere, be they wild or tame, for fodder and for shelter; and to whinny to the forest ponies, miles away from home, perhaps, and lead them all, with rare appetite and promise of abundance, to her master's homestead. He shod good Winnie in such a manner that she could not sink in the snow; and he clad her over the loins with a sheep-skin, dyed to her own color, which the wild horses were never tired of coming up and sniffing at, taking it for an especial gift and proof of inspiration.

And Winnie never came home at night without at least a score of ponies trotting shyly after her, tossing their heads and their tails in turn, and making believe to be very wild, although hard

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pinched by famine. Of course Tom would get them all into his pound in about five minutes, for he himself could neigh in a manner which went to the heart of the wildest horse. And then he fed them well, and turned them into his great cattle-pen, to abide their time for breaking when the snow and frost should be over.

He had gotten more than three hundred now in this sagacious manner; and he said it was the finest sight to see their mode of carrying on. How they would snort and stamp and fume, and prick their ears, and rush backwards, and lash themselves with their long, rough tails, and shake their jagged manes, and scream, and fall upon one another, if a strange man came anigh them. But as for feeding time, Tom said it was better than fifty plays to watch them, and the tricks they were up to to cheat their feeders and one another.

I went at last in search of Lorna to tell her of our cousin's arrival, and to ask whether she would think fit to see him, or to dine by herself that day, for she should do exactly as it pleased her in everything while remaining still our guest. But I rather wished that she might choose not to sit in Tom's company, though she might be introduced to him. Not but what he could behave quite as well as I could, and much better as regarded elegance and assurance, only that his honesty had not been as one might desire. But Lorna had some curiosity to know what this famous man was like, and declared that she would by all means have the pleasure of dining with him if he did not object to her company on the ground of the Doone's dishonesty; moreover, she said that it would seem a most foolish air on her part, and one which would cause the greatest pain to Annie, who had been so good to her, if she should refuse to sit at table with a man who held the king's pardon, and was now a pattern of honesty.

Against this I had not a word to say and could not help acknowledging in my heart that she was right, as well as wise, in her decision. And afterwards I discovered that mother would have been much displeased if she had decided otherwise.

Accordingly she turned away, with one of her very sweetest smiles, saying that she must not meet a man of such fashion and renown, in her common gardening frock, but must try to look as nice as she could, if only in honor of dear Annie. And truth to tell,

when she came to dinner, everything about her was the neatest and the prettiest that can possibly be imagined. She contrived to match the colors so, to suit one another and her own, and yet with a certain delicate harmony of contrast, and the shape of everything was so nice, that when she came into the room, wearing her ancient necklace, I was quite as proud as if the Queen of England entered.

Now, when the young maidens were gone—for we had quite a high dinner of fashion that day, with Betty Muxworthy waiting, and Gwenny Carfax at the gravy—and only mother and Tom and I remained at the white deal table, with brandy and schnapps and hot water jugs, Squire Faggus said quite suddenly, and perhaps on purpose to take us aback in case of our hiding anything:

"What do you know of the history of that beautiful maiden, good mother?"

"Not half so much as my son does," mother answered, with a soft smile at me; "and when John does not choose to tell a thing, wild horses will not pull it out of him."

"That is not at all like me, mother," I replied, rather sadly; "you know almost every word about Lorna, quite as well as I do."

"Almost every word, I believe, John, for you never tell a falsehood. But the few unknown may be of all the most important to me."

To this I made no answer, for fear of going beyond the truth, or else of making mischief. Not that I had, or wished to have, any mystery with mother; neither was there, in purest truth, any mystery in the matter, to the utmost of my knowledge. And the only things that I had kept back, solely for mother's comfort, were the death of poor Lord Alan Brandir, if, indeed, he were dead, and the connection of Marwood de Whichehalse with the dealings of the Doones, and the threats of Carver Doone against my own prosperity; and, maybe, one or two little things, harrowing more than edifying.

"Come, come," said Master Faggus, smiling very pleasantly, "you two understand each other, if any two on earth do. Ah, if I had only had a mother, how different I might have been!" And with that he sighed, and grew very wise, and told us clearly and candidly that we were both very foolish. For he said that we were keeping Lorna at the risk not only of our stock and the house above

our heads, but also of our precious lives; and, after all, was she worth it, although so very beautiful? Upon which I told him, with indignation, that her beauty was the least part of her goodness, and that I would thank him for his opinion when I had requested it.

"Bravo, our John Ridd!" he answered; "fools will be fools till the end of the chapter; and I might be as big a one, if I were in thy shoes, John. Nevertheless, don't let that helpless child go about with a thing worth half the country on her."

"She is worth all the country herself," said I, "and all England put together; but she has nothing worth half a rick of hay upon her; for the ring I gave her cost only"—and here I stopped, for mother was looking, and I never would tell her how much it had cost me, though she had tried fifty times to find out.

"Tush, the ring!" Tom Faggus cried, with a contempt that moved me; "I would never have stopped a man for that. But the necklace, you great oaf, the necklace is worth all your farm put together, and your Uncle Ben's fortune to the back of it; ay, and all the town of Dulverton."

"What," said I, "that common glass thing, which she has had from her childhood!"

"Glass, indeed! They are the finest diamonds ever I set eyes on; and I have handled a good many."

"Surely," cried mother, now flushing as red as Tom's own cheeks with excitement, "you must be wrong, or the young mistress would herself have known it."

"Trust me," answered Tom, in his loftiest manner, "trust me, good mother, and simple John, for knowing diamonds when I see them. I would have stopped an eight-horse coach, with four carabined outriders, for such a booty as that. But, alas, those days are over: those were days worth living in. Ah, I never shall know the like again. How fine it was by moolight!"

"Master Faggus," began my mother, with a manner of some dignity, such as she could sometimes use,by right of her integrity, and thorough kindness to every one, "this is not the tone in which you have hitherto spoken to me about your former pursuits and life. You have won my daughter's heart somehow; and you won my consent to the matter through your honest sorrow, and manly undertaking to lead a different life, and touch no property but your

own. Annie is my eldest daughter, and the child of a most upright man. I love her best of all on earth, next to my boy John here"—here mother gave me a mighty squeeze, to be sure that she would have me, at least—"and I will not risk my Annie's life with a man who yearns for the highway."

CHAPTER XXVII

JEREMY IN DANGER

MY MOTHER, being one of the very best, could not long retain her wrath against Squire Faggus. But how she contrived to know that, because she had been too hard upon Tom, he must be right about the necklace, is a point I never could clearly perceive.

To prove herself right in the conclusion, she went herself to fetch Lorna that the trinket might be examined before the day grew dark. My darling came in, and mother led her up to the light for Tom to examine her necklace.

On the shapely curve of her neck it hung, like dew-drops upon a white hyacinth, and I was vexed that Tom should have the chance to see it there. But even as if she had read my thoughts, or outrun them with her own, Lorna turned away and softly took the jewels from the place which so much adorned them. And as she turned away, they sparkled through the rich dark waves of hair. Then she laid the glittering circlet in my mother's hands; and Tom Faggus took it eagerly, and bore it to the window.

"Don't you go out of sight," I said; "you cannot resist such things as those, if they be what you think them."

"Jack, I will have to trounce thee yet. I am now a man of honor. What will you take for it, Mistress Lorna? At a hazard, say now."

"I am not accustomed to sell things, sir," replied Lorna, who did not like him much, else she would have answered sportively, "What is it worth, in your opinion?"

"Do you think it is worth five pounds, now?"

"Oh, no! I never had so much money as that in all my life. It is very bright and very pretty, but it cannot be worth five pounds, I am sure."

"What a chance for a bargain. Oh, if it were not for Annie I could make my fortune.

"But, sir, I would not sell it to you, not for twenty times five pounds. My grandfather was so kind about it, and I think it belonged to my mother."

"There are twenty-five rose diamonds in it, and twenty-five large brilliants that cannot be matched in London. How say you, Mistress Lorna, to a hundred thousand pounds?"

My darling's eyes so flashed at this, brighter than any diamonds, that I said to myself, "Well, all have faults; and now I have found out Lorna's—she is fond of money!" And then I sighed rather heavily, for of all faults this seems to me one of the worst in a woman. But even before my sigh was finished I had cause to condemn myself. For Lorna took the necklace very quietly from the hand of Squire Faggus, who had not half done with admiring it, and she went up to my mother with the sweetest smile I ever saw.

"Dear, kind mother, I am so glad," she said, in a whisper, "now you will have it, won't you dear? And I will be so happy, for a thousandth part of your kindness to me no jewels in the world can match."

I cannot lay before you the grace with which she did it, all the air of seeking favor rather than conferring it, and the high-bred fear of giving offense, which is of all fears the noblest. Mother knew not what to say. Of couse, she would never dream of taking such a gift as that; and yet she saw how sadly Lorna would be disappointed. Therefore mother did, from habit, what she almost always did; she called me to help her. But knowing that my eyes were full—for anything noble moves me so, quite as rashly as things pitiful—I pretended not to hear my mother, but to see a wild cat in the dairy.

Therefore I cannot tell what mother said in reply to Lorna, for when I came back, quite eager to let my love know how I worshipped her and how deeply I was ashamed of myself for meanly wronging her in my heart, behold, Tom Faggus had gotten again the necklace and was delivering all around a dissertation on precious stones, and his sentiments about those in his hand.

He said that the work was very ancient but undoubtedly very good, the cutting of every line was true, and every angle was in its place. And this, he said, made all the difference in the lustre of

the stone, and therefore in its value. For if the facets were ill-matched and the points of light ever so little out of perfect harmony, all the lustre of the jewel would be loose and wavering, and the central fire dulled.

Tom Faggus said that the necklace was made, he would answer for it, in Amsterdam, two or three hundred years ago, long before London jewellers had begun to meddle with diamonds; and on the gold clasp he found some letters, done in some inverted way, the meaning of which was beyond him; also a bearing of some kind which he believed was a mountain-cat.

We said no more about the necklace for a long time afterwards; neither did my darling wear it, now that she knew its value, but did not know its history. She came to me the very next day, trying to look cheerful, and begged me to take charge of it and not even to let her know in what place I stored it.

Tom Faggus took his good departure on the very day I am speaking of, the day after his arrival. Scarcely was he clean out of sight, and Annie's tears not dry yet, for she always made a point of crying upon his departure, when in came Master Jeremy Stickles, splashed with mud from head to foot and not in the very best of humors, though happy to get back again.

"Curse those fellows!" he cried, with a stamp which sent the water hissing from his boot among the embers; "a pretty plight you may call this for his majesty's commissioner to return to his headquarters in!"

It appears that as he was riding towards us from the town of Southmoulton in Devonshire, he found the roads very soft and heavy and the floods out in all directions, but met with no other difficulty until he came to Landacre Bridge. He had only a single trooper with him, a man not of the militia, but of the king's army, whom Jeremy had brought from Exeter. As these two descended towards the bridge they observed that both the Kensford water and the river Barle were pouring down in mighty floods from the melting snow. So great, indeed, was the torrent, after they united, that only the parapets of the bridge could be seen above the water, the road across either bank being covered and very deep on the hither side.

The trooper did not like the look of it, and proposed to ride back

again and round by way of Simonsbath where the stream is smaller. But Stickles would not have it so, and dashing into the river, swam his horse for the bridge and gained it with some little trouble; and there he found the water not more than up to his horse's knees, perhaps. On the crown of the bridge he turned his horse to watch the trooper's passage and to help him with directions, when suddenly he saw him fall headlong into the torrent, and heard the report of a gun from behind, and felt a shock to his own body such as lifted him out of the saddle. Turning round, he beheld three men, risen up from behind the hedge on one side of his onward road, two of them ready to load again, and one with his gun unfired, waiting to get good aim at him.

Then Jeremy did a gallant thing. He saw that to swim his horse back again would be almost certain death, as affording such a target where even a wound must be fatal. Therefore he struck the spurs into the nag and rode through the water straight at the man who was pointing the long gun at him. If the horse had been carried off his legs there must have been an end of Jeremy, for the other men were getting ready to have another shot at him. But luckily the horse galloped right on without any need for swimming, being himself excited, no doubt, by all he had seen and heard of it. And Jeremy lay almost flat on his neck, so as to give little space for good aim with the mane tossing wildly in front of him.

Now, if that young fellow with the gun had had his brains as ready as his flint was, he would have shot the horse at once and then had Stickles at his mercy; but instead of that he let fly at the man and missed him altogether, being scared, perhaps, by the pistol which Jeremy showed him the mouth of. And galloping by at full speed, Master Stickles tried to leave his mark behind him, for he changed the aim of his pistol to the biggest man, who was loading his gun and cursing like ten cannons. But the pistol missed fire, no doubt from the flood which had gurgled in over the holsters, and Jeremy, seeing three horses tethered at a gate just up the hill, knew that he had not yet escaped but had more of danger behind him. He tried his other great pistol at one of the horses tethered there so as to lessen, if possible, the number of his pursuers. But the powder again failed him and he durst not stop to cut the bridles, hearing the men coming up the hill. So he even made

In the settle was my Lorna, propped with pillows.

—*Page 160*

the most of his start, for his weight was light compared to what theirs was.

And another thing he had noticed which gave him some hope of escaping, that the horses of the Doones, although very handsome animals, were suffering still from the bitter effects of the late long frost and the scarcity of fodder. "If they do not catch me up or shoot me in the course of the first two miles, I may see my home again;" this was what he said to himself, as he turned to mark what they were about from the brow of the steep hill. He saw the flooded valley shining with the breadth of water, and the trooper's horse on the other side, shaking his drenched flanks and neighing; and half-way down the hill he saw the three Doones mounting hastily. And then he knew that his only chance lay in the stoutness of his steed.

The horse was in pretty good condition; and the rider knew him thoroughly, and how to make the most of him; and though they had travelled some miles that day through very heavy ground, the bath in the river had washed the mud off and been some refreshment. Therefore Stickles encouraged his nag, and put him into a good hand gallop, heading away towards Withycombe.

The three villians came after him with all the speed they could muster, making sure, from the badness of the road, that he must stick fast ere long and so be at their mercy. And this was Jeremy's chiefest fear, for the ground being soft and thoroughly rotten after so much frost and snow, the poor horse had terrible work of it with no time to pick the way.

At one time poor Stickles was quite in despair, for, after leaping a little brook which crosses the track at Newland, he stuck fast in a dancing bog as we call them upon Exmoor. The horse had broken through the crust of moss and sedge and marsh-weed and could do nothing but wallow and sink, with the black water spirting over him. And Jeremy, struggling with all might, saw the three villians now topping the crest less than a furlong behind him, and heard them shout in their savage delight.

With the calmness of despair he yet resolved to have one more try for it, and scrambling over the horse's head, gained firm land, and tugged at the bridle. The poor nag replied with all his power to the call upon his courage, and reared his fore-feet out of the

slough, and with straining eye-balls gazed at him. "Now," said Jeremy, "now, my fine fellow!" lifting him with the bridle; and the brave beast gathered the roll of his loins and sprang from his quagmired haunches. One more spring and he was on earth again, instead of being under it; and Jeremy leaped on his back, and stooped, for he knew that they would fire. Two bullets whistled over him as the horse, mad with fright, dashed forward; and in five minutes more he had come to the Exe, and the pursuers had fallen behind him.

The Exe, though a much smaller stream than the Barle, now ran in a foaming torrent, unabridged, and too wide for leaping. But Jeremy's horse took the water well, and both he and his rider were lightened as well as comforted by it. And as they passed towards Lucott hill, and struck upon the founts at Lynn, the horses of the three pursuers began to tire under them. Then Jeremy Stickles knew that if he could only escape the sloughs he was safe for the present; and so he stood up in his stirrups, and gave them a loud halloo, as if they had been so many foxes.

Their only answer was to fire the remaining charge at him; but the distance was too great for any aim from horseback, and the dropping bullet idly ploughed the sod upon one side of him. He acknowledged it with a wave of his hat, and laid one thumb to his nose, in the manner fashionable in London for expression of contempt. However, they followed him yet farther, hoping to make him pay out dearly if he should only miss the track or fall upon morasses. But the neighborhood of our Lynn stream is not so very boggy, and the king's messenger now knew his way as well as any of the pursuers did; and so he arrived at Plover's Barrows, thankful, and in rare appetite.

CHAPTER XXVIII

EVERY MAN MUST DEFEND HIMSELF

IT was only right in Jeremy Stickles, and of the simplest common sense, that he would not tell before our girls what the result of his journey was. But he led me aside in the course of the evening, and told me all about it, saying that I knew, as well as he did, that it was not woman's business.

Master Stickles complained that he knew the weather had been against him bitterly, closing all the roads around him, even as it had done with us. It had taken him eight days, he said, to get from Exeter to Plymouth; whither he found that most of the troops had been draughted off from Exeter. When all was told, there was but a battalion of one of the king's horse regiments, and two companies of foot soldiers; and their commanders had orders, later than the date of Jeremy's commission, on no account to quit the southern coast and march inland. Therefore, although they would gladly have come for a brush with the celebrated Doones, it was more than they durst attempt in the face of their instructions. However they spared him a single trooper as a companion of the road, and to prove to the justices of the county and the lord-lieutenant that he had their approval.

To these authorities Master Stickles now was forced to address himself, although he would rather have had one trooper than a score from the very best trained bands. For these trained bands had afforded very good soldiers in the time of the civil wars, and for some years afterwards; but now their discipline was gone, and the younger generation had seen no real fighting.

Neither was this the worst of it, for Jeremy made no doubt but what he might manage, with the help of his own men, to force the stronghold of the enemy; but the truth was that the officers, knowing how hard it would be to collect their men at that time of the year and in that state of the weather, began with one accord to make every possible excuse. And meanwhile what were we to do, abandoned as we were to the mercies of the Doones, with only our

own hands to help us? I grieved at my own folly in having let Tom Faggus go, whose wit and courage would have been worth at least half a dozen men to us. Upon this matter I held long council with my good friend Stickles; telling him all about Lorna's presence, and what I knew of her history. He agreed with me that we could not hope to escape an attack from the outlaws, and the more especially now that they knew himself to be returned to us. Also he praised me for my forethought in having threshed out all our corn, and hidden the produce in such a manner that they were not likely to find it. Furthermore, he recommended that all the entrances to the house should at once be strengthened, and a watch must be maintained at night; and he thought it wiser that I should go, late as it was, to Lynmouth, if a horse could pass the valley, and fetch every one of his mounted troopers who might now be quartered there. Also, if any men of courage, though capable only of handling a pitchfork, could be found in the neighborhood, I was to try to summon them. But our district is so thinly peopled that I had little faith in this; however, my errand was given me, and I set forth upon it.

As it happened, there were but four of these men; however, to have even these was a help, and I started at full speed for home, for the men must follow afoot and cross our river high up on the moorland.

This took them a long way round, and the track was rather bad to find, and the sky already darkening; so that I arrived at Plover's Barrows more than two hours before them. But they had done a sagacious thing, which was well worth the delay; for, by hoisting their flag upon the hill, they fetched the two watchmen from the Foreland, and added them to their number.

It was lucky that I came home so soon, for I found the house in a great commotion and all the women trembling. When I asked what the matter was, Lorna, who seemed the most self-possessed, answered that it was all her fault, for she alone had frightened them. And this in the following manner. She had stolen out to the garden towards dusk, to watch some favorite hyacinths just pushing up, like a baby's teeth, and just attracting the fatal notice of a great house-snail at night time. Lorna at last had discovered the glutton and was bearing him off in triumph to the tribunal of

the ducks, when she described two glittering eyes glaring at her steadfastly from the elder-bush beyond the stream. The elder was smoothing its wrinkled leaves, being at least two months behind time; and among them this calm, cruel face appeared, and she knew it was the face of Carver Doone.

The maiden, although so used to terror, lost all presence of mind and could neither shriek nor fly, but only gaze, as if bewitched. Then Carver Doone, with his deadly smile, gloating upon her horror, lifted his long gun, and pointed full at Lorna's heart. In vain she strove to turn away; fright had stricken her stiff as stone.

With no sign of pity in his face, no quiver of relenting, but a well-pleased grin at all the charming palsy of his victim, Carver Doone lowered, inch by inch, the muzzle of his gun. When it pointed to the ground, between her delicate arched insteps, he pulled the trigger, and the bullet flung the mould all over her. It was a refinement of bullying, for which I swore that night I would smite down Carver Doone, or else he should smite me down.

My darling fell away on a bank of grass, and wept at her own cowardice, and trembled, and wondered where I was, and what I would think of this.

While she leaned there, quite unable yet to save herself, Carver came to the brink of the flood which alone was between them; and then he stroked his jet-black beard, and waited for Lorna to begin. Very likely he thought that she would thank him for his kindness to her. But she was now recovering the power of her nimble limbs, and was ready to be off like hope, and wonder at her own cowardice.

"I have spared you this time," he said, in his deep, calm voice, "only because it suits my plans; and I never yield to temper. But unless you come back to-morrow with all you took away, and teach me to destroy that fool who has destroyed himself for you, your death is here, where it has long been waiting."

Although his gun was empty, he struck the breech of it with his finger; and then he turned away, not deigning even once to look back again; and Lorna saw his giant figure striding across the meadow-land, as if the Ridds were nobodies and he the proper owner. But mother and I were greatly hurt at hearing of this

insolence, for we had owned that meadow from the time of the great Alfred, and even when that good king lay in the Isle of Athelney, he had a Ridd along with him.

Now I spoke to Lorna gently, seeing how much she had been tried; and I praised her for her courage in not having run away, when she was so unable; and my darling was pleased with this and smiled upon me for saying it, though she knew right well that, in this matter, my judgment was not impartial.

Now, expecting a sharp attack that night — which Jeremy Stickles the more expected after the words of Carver, which seemed to be meant to mislead us—we prepared a great quantity of knuckles of pork and a ham in full cut and a fillet of hung mutton. For we would almost surrender rather than keep our garrison hungry. And all our men were exceedingly brave, and counted their rounds of the house in half-pints.

Before the maidens went to bed Lorna made a remark which seemed to me a very clever one, and then I wondered how on earth it had never occurred to me before. But first she had done a thing which I could not in the least approve of, for she had gone up to my mother and thrown herself into her arms and begged to be allowed to return to Glen Doone.

"My child, are you unhappy here?" mother asked her very gently, for she had begun to regard her now as a daughter of her own.

"Oh, no! Too happy, by far too happy, Mrs. Ridd. I never knew rest or peace before, or met with real kindness. But I cannot be so ungrateful, I cannot be so wicked, as to bring you all into deadly peril for my sake alone. Let me go; you must not pay this great price for my happiness."

"Dear child, we are paying no price at all," replied my mother, embracing her; "we are not threatened for your sake only. Ask John, he will tell you. He knows every bit about politics, and this is a political matter."

We sent all the women to bed quite early, except Gwenny Carfax and our old Betty. These two we allowed to stay up, because they might be useful to us if they could keep from quarrelling. It was not likely on account of the floods in the Doone Glen that the Doones could bring more than eight or ten men against us

while their homes might be in danger; and to meet these we had eight good men, including Jeremy and myself, all well armed and resolute, besides our three farm-servants and the parish clerk and the shoemaker. These five could not be trusted much for any valiant conduct, although they spoke very confidently over their cans of cider. Neither were their weapons fitted for much execution, unless it were at close quarters, which they would be likely to avoid. Bill Dadds had a sickle, Jem Slocombe a flail, the cobbler had borrowed the constable's staff, for the constable would not attend because there was no warrant, and the parish clerk had brought his pitch-pipe, which was enough to break any man's head. John Fry, of course, had his blunderbuss, loaded with tin-tacks and marbles, and more likely to kill the man who discharged it than any other person; but we knew that John had it only for show and to describe its qualities.

Now it was my great desire and my chiefest hope to come across Carver Doone that night, and settle the score between us, not by any shot in the dark, but by a conflct man to man.

Therefore I was not content to abide within the house or go the rounds with the troopers, but betook myself to the rickyard, knowing that the Doones were likely to begin their onset there. For they had a pleasant custom, when they visited farm-houses, of lighting themselves towards picking up anything they wanted, or stabbing the inhabitants, by first creating a blaze in the rick-yard. And though our ricks were all now of mere straw, except two of prime clover hay, and although on the top they were so wet that no firebrands might hurt them, I was both unwilling to have them burned, and fearful that they might kindle if well roused up with fire upon the windward side.

I had not been so very long waiting in our mowyard with my best gun ready and a big club by me, before a heaviness of sleep began to creep upon me. The flow of water was in my ears, and in my eyes a hazy spreading, and upon my brain a closure as a cobbler sews a vamp up. So I leaned back in the clover rick, and the dust of the seed and the smell came round me, without any trouble; and I dreamed about Lorna, just once or twice, and then back went my head, and my chin went up; and if ever a man was blest with slumber, down it came upon me, and away went I into it.

CHAPTER XXIX

MAIDEN SENTINELS ARE BEST

IT was not likely that the outlaws would attack our premises until some time after the moon was risen, because it would be too dangerous to cross the flooded valleys in the darkness of the night. And, but for this consideration, I must have striven harder against the stealthy approach of slumber. But even so, it was very foolish to abandon watch, especially in such as I who sleep like any dormouse. Moreover, I had chosen the very worst place in the world for such employment with a goodly chance of awaking in a bed of solid fire.

And so it might have been, nay, it must have been, but for Lorna's vigilance. Her light hand upon my arm awoke me, not too readily; and, leaping up, I seized my club and prepared to knock down somebody.

"Who's that?" I cried; "stand back, I say, and let me have fair chance at you."

"Are you going to knock me down, dear John?" replied the voice I loved so well; "I am sure I should never get up again after one blow from you, John."

"My darling, is it you?" I cried; "and breaking all your orders. Come back into the house at once; and nothing on your head, dear!"

"How could I sleep, while at any moment you might be killed beneath my window? And now is the time of real danger, for men can see to travel."

I saw at once the truth of this. The moon was high, and clearly lighting all the watered valleys. To sleep any longer might be death, not only to myself, but all.

"The man on guard at the back of the house is fast asleep," she continued; "Gwenny, who let me out and came with me, has heard him snoring for two hours. I think the women ought to be the watch, because they have had no travelling. Where do you suppose little Gwenny is?"

"Surely not gone to Glen Doone?" I was not sure, however, for I could believe almost anything of the Cornish maiden's hardihood.

"No," replied Lorna, "although she wanted even to do that. But of course I would not hear of it, on account of the swollen waters. But she is perched in yonder tree, which commands the Barrow valley. She says that they are almost sure to cross the streamlet there; and now it is so wide and large that she can trace it in the moonlight, half a mile beyond her. If they cross, she is sure to see them and in good time to let us know."

"What a shame," I cried, "that the men should sleep, and the maidens be the soldiers! I will sit in that tree myself, and send little Gwenny back to you. Go to bed, my best and dearest; I will take good care not to sleep again."

"Please not to send me away, dear John," she answered very mournfully; "you and I have been together through perils worse than this. I shall only be more timid and more miserable indoors."

"I cannot let you stay here," I said; "it is altogether impossible. Do you suppose that I can fight with you among the bullets, Lorna? If this is the way you mean to take it, we had better go both to the apple room, and lock ourselves in, and hide under the tiles, and let them burn all the rest of the premises."

At this idea Lorna laughed, as I could see by the moonlight; and then she said:

"You are right, John. I should only do more harm than good; and of all things I hate fighting most, and disobedience next to it. Therefore, I will go indoors, although I cannot go to bed. But promise me one thing, dearest John. You will keep yourself out of the way, now, won't you, as much as you can, for my sake?"

"Of that you may be quite certain, Lorna. I will shoot them all through the hay ricks."

"That is right, dear," she answered, never doubting but what I could do it; "and then they cannot see you, you know. But don't think of climbing that tree, John; it is a great deal too dangerous. It is all very well for Gwenny; she has no bones to break."

"None worth breaking, you mean, I suppose. Very well; I will not climb the tree, for I should defeat my own purpose, I fear, being such a conspicuous object. Now go indoors, darling, without more words;. The more you linger, the more I shall keep you."

She laughed her own bright laugh at this, and only said: "God keep you, love!" And then away she tripped across the yard, with the step I loved to watch so. And thereupon I shouldered arms, and resolved to tramp till morning. For I was vexed at my own neglect, and that Lorna should have to right it.

But before I had been long on duty, making the round of the ricks and stables and hailing Gwenny now and then from the bottom of her tree, a short, wide figure stole towards me, in and out the shadows, and I saw that it was no other than the little maid herself, and that she bore some tidings.

"Ten on 'em cross the watter down yonner," said Gwenny, putting her hand to her mouth, and seeming to regard it as good news rather than otherwise; "be arl craping up by hedgerow now. I could shut dree on 'em from the bar of the gate, if so be I had your goon, young man."

"There is no time to lose, Gwenny. Run to the house and fetch Master Stickles and all the men, while I stay here, and watch the rickyard."

The robbers rode into our yard as coolly as if they had been invited, having lifted the gate from the hinges first on account of its being fastened. Then they actually opened our stable doors, and turned our honest horses out, and put their own rogues in the place of them. At this my breath was quite taken away, for we think so much of our horses. By this time I could see our troopers, waiting in the shadow of the house round the corner from where the Doones were, and expecting the order to fire. But Jeremy Stickles very wisely kept them in readiness until the enemy should advance upon them.

"Two of you lazy fellows go"—it was the deep voice of Carver Doone—"and make us a light to cut their throats by. Only one thing, once again. If any man touches Lorna, I will stab him where he stands. She belongs to me. Now for our rights. We have borne too long the insolence of these yokels. Kill every man and every child, and burn the cursed place down."

As he spoke thus I set my gun against his breast; and, by the light buckled from his belt, I saw the little "sight" of brass gleaming alike upon either side and the sleek round barrel glimmering. The aim was sure as death itself. If I only drew the trigger, Carver

Doone would breathe no more. And yet—will you believe me?—I could not pull the trigger.

For I never had taken human life, neither done bodily harm to man beyond the little bruises and the trifling aches and pains which followed a good and honest bout in the wrestling ring. Therefore I dropped my carbine and grasped again my club, which seemed a more straightforward implement.

Presently two young men came towards me bearing brands of resined hemp kindled from Carver's lamp. The foremost of them set his torch to the rick within a yard of me, the smoke concealing me from him. I struck him with a backhanded blow on the elbow as he bent it; and I heard the bone of his arm break, as clearly as ever I heard a twig snap. With a roar of pain he fell on the ground, and his torch dropped there and singed him. The other man stood amazed at this, not having yet gained sight of me, till I caught his firebrand from his hand and struck it into his countenance. With that he leaped at me, but I caught him in a manner learned from early wrestling, and snapped his collar bone as I laid him upon the top of his comrade.

This little success so encouraged me that I was half inclined to advance and challenge Carver Doone to meet me, but I bore in mind that he would be apt to shoot me without ceremony; and what is the utmost of human strength against the power of powder? Moreover, I remembered my promise to sweet Lorna, and who would be left to defend her, if the rogues got rid of me?

While I was hesitating thus a blaze of fire lit up the house, and brown smoke hung around it. Six of our men had let go at the Doones, by Jeremy Stickles's order, as the villains came swaggering down in the moonlight ready for rape or murder. Two of them fell, and the rest hung back to think at their leisure what this was. They were not used to this sort of thing; it was neither just nor courteous.

Being unable any longer to contain myself, as I thought of Lorna's excitement at all this noise of firing, I came across the yard, expecting whether they would shoot at me. However, no one shot at me; and I went up to Carver Doone, whom I knew by his size in the moonlight, and I took him by the beard, and said, "Do you call yourself a man?"

For a moment he was so astonished that he could not answer. None had ever dared, I suppose, to look at him in that way; and he saw that he had met his equal, or perhaps his master. And then he tried a pistol at me, but I was too quick for him.

"Now, Carver Doone, take warning," I said to him very soberly; "you have shown yourself a fool, by your contempt of me. I may not be your match in craft, but I am in manhood. You are a despicable villain. Lie low in your native muck."

And with that word I laid him flat upon his back in our straw-yard by a trick of the inner heel, which he could not have resisted unless he were a wrestler. Seeing him down, the others ran, though one of them made a shot at me and some of them got their horses before our men came up; and some went away without them. And among these last were Captain Carver, who arose while I was feeling myself, for I had a little wound, and strode away with a train of curses enough to poison the light of the moon.

We gained six very good horses by this attempted rapine, as well as two young prisoners whom I had smitten by the clover rick. And two dead Doones were left behind, whom, as we buried them in the churchyard, without any service over them, I, for my part, was most thankful that I had not killed. For to have the life of a fellow man laid upon one's conscience—deserved he his death, or deserved it not—is to my sense of right and wrong the heaviest of all burdens.

I was inclined to pursue the enemy and try to capture more of them; but Jeremy Stickles would not allow it, for he said that all the advantage would be upon their side if we went hurrying after them with only the moon to guide us. And who could tell but what there might be another band of them, ready to fall upon the house and burn it and seize the women, if we left them unprotected? When he put the case thus, I was glad enough to abide by his decision. And one thing was quite certain, that the Doones had never before received so rude a shock, and so violent a blow to their supremacy, since first they had built up their power and became the Lords of Exmoor.

I scarcely know who made the greatest fuss about my little wound, mother, or Annie, or Lorna. I was heartily ashamed to be so treated like a milksop, but most unluckily it had been impos-

He tried a pistol at me, but I was too quick for him.

—*Page 184*

sible to hide it. For the ball had cut along my temple, just above the eyebrow; and being fired so near at hand, the powder, too, had scarred me. Therefore it seemed a great deal worse than it really was; and the sponging and the plastering and the sobbing and the moaning made me quite ashamed to look Master Stickles in the face.

Without waiting for any warrant, Stickles sent our prisoners off, bound and looking miserable, to the jail at Taunton. I was desirous to let them go free if they would promise amendment, but Master Stickles said, "Not so." He assured me that it was a matter of public polity.

Therefore I let my prisoners go, and wished them a happy deliverance. Stickles replied, with a merry grin, that if they ever got it, it would be a jail deliverance and the bliss of dancing; and he laid his hand to his throat in a manner which seemed to me most uncourteous. However, his foresight proved too correct, for both those poor fellows were executed soon after the next assizes. Lorna had done her very best to earn another chance for them, even going down on her knees to that common Jeremy and pleading with great tears for them. However, although much moved by her, he vowed that he durst do nothing else. To set them free was more than his own life was worth, for all the country knew, by this time, that two captive Doones were roped to the cider press at Plover's Barrows. Annie bound the broken arm of the one whom I had knocked down with the club, and I myself supported it; and then she washed and rubbed with lard the face of the other poor fellow, which the torch had injured; and I fetched back his collar bone to the best of my ability. For before any surgeon could arrive, they were off with a well-armed escort. That day we were reinforced so strongly from the stations along the coast, even as far as Minehead, that we not only feared no further attack, but even talked of assaulting Glen Doone without waiting for the train bands. However, I thought that it would be mean to take advantage of the enemy in the thick of the floods and confusion; and several of the others thought so, too, and did not like fighting in water. Therefore it was resolved to wait and keep a watch upon the valley, and let the floods go down again.

CHAPTER XXX

A VISIT FROM THE COUNSELLOR

I WAS riding home from the fields where I had been working one evening when my sister Eliza met me at the corner of the cheese room, and she said: "Don't go in there, John," pointing to mother's room, "until I tell you about our visitor. Do you know a man of about Gwenny's shape, nearly as broad as he is long, but about six times the size of Gwenny, and with a length of snow-white hair, and a thickness also as the copses were last winter. He never can comb it, that is quite certain, with any comb yet invented."

I was almost sure that the man who was come must be the Counsellor himself, of whom I felt much keener fear than of his son Carver. And knowing that his visit boded ill to me and Lorna, I went and sought my dear and led her, with a heavy heart, from the maidens' room to mother's to meet our dreadful visitor.

Mother was standing by the door, making courtesies now and then, and listening to a long harangue upon the rights of state and land which the Counsellor was encouraged to deliver. My dear mother stood gazing at him, spellbound by his eloquence, and only hoping that he would stop. He was shaking his hair upon his shoulders in the power of his words and his wrath at some little thing, which he declared to be quite illegal.

Then I ventured to show myself in the flesh before him, although he feigned not to see me; but he advanced with zeal to Lorna, holding out both hands at once.

"My darling child, my dearest niece, how wonderfully well you look! Mistress Ridd, I give you credit. This is the country of good things. I never would have believed our Queen could have looked so royal. Surely, of all virtues, hospitality is the finest and the most romantic. Dearest Lorna, kiss your uncle. And this must be your son, Mistress Ridd, the great John, the wrestler. Now I can hardly be wrong in assuming that this young man must

be the too attractive cynosure to our poor little maiden. And, for my part, she is welcome to him. I have never been one of those who dwell upon distinctions of rank and birth and such like as if they were in the heart of nature, and must be eternal. I may now be regarded, I think, as this young lady's legal guardian, although I have not had the honor of being formally appointed such. Her father was the eldest son of Sir Ensor Doone, and I happened to be the second son; and, as young maidens cannot be baronets, I suppose I am 'Sir Counsellor.' As Lorna's guardian, I give my full and ready consent to her marriage with your son, madam."

That night the reverend Counsellor slept in our best old bedstead, carved in panels. I, for my part, scarcely knew whether he really had begun to feel good will towards us, and to see that nothing else could be of any use to him; or whether he was merely acting, so as to deceive us. Neither did I quite understand a little story which Lorna told me, how that in the night awaking, she had heard, or seemed to hear, a sound of feeling in her room as if there had been some one groping carefully among the things within her drawers or wardrobe closet. But the noise had ceased at once, she said, when she sat up in bed and listened; and knowing how many mice we had, she took courage and fell asleep again.

After breakfast, the Counsellor followed our Annie into the dairy to see how we managed the clotted cream, of which he had eaten a basinful. And thereupon they talked a little; and Annie thought him a fine old gentleman and a very just one, for he had nobly condemned the people who spoke against Tom Faggus.

"Your honor must plainly understand," said Annie, being now alone with him, and spreading out her light quick hands over the pans, like butterflies, "that they are brought in here to cool, after being set in the basin holes, with the wood ash under them, which I showed you in the back kitchen. And they must have very little heat, not enough to simmer even, only just to make the bubbles rise and the scum upon the top set thick; and after that, it clots as firm—oh, as firm as my two hands be."

"Have you ever heard," asked the Counsellor, who enjoyed this talk with Annie, "that if you pass across the top, without breaking the surface, a string of beads, or polished glass, or any-

thing of that kind, the cream will set three times as solid, and in thrice the quantity?"

"No, sir; I have never heard that," said Annie, staring with all her simple eyes; "what a thing it is to read books and grow learned? But it is very easy to try it; I will get my coral necklace. It will not be witchcraft, will it, sir?"

"Certainly not," the old man replied. "I will make the experiment myself, and you may trust me not to be hurt, my dear. But coral will not do, my child, neither will anything colored. The beads must be of a plain common glass, but the brighter they are the better."

"Then I know the very thing," cried Annie; "as bright as bright can be and without any color in it, except in the sun or candle light. Dearest Lorna has the very thing, a necklace of some old glass beads, or I think they called them jewels; she will be only too glad to lend it to us. I will go for it, in a moment."

"My dear, it cannot be half so bright as your own pretty eyes. But remember one thing, Annie, you must not say what it is for; or even that I am going to use it, or anything at all about it; else the charm will be broken. Bring it here without a word if you know where she keeps it."

"To be sure I do," she answered; "John used to keep it for her. But she took it away from him last week, and she wore it when—I mean when somebody was here; and he said it was very valuable and spoke with great learning about it, and called it by some particular name which I forget at this moment. But, valuable or not, we cannot hurt it, can we, sir, by passing it over the cream pan?"

"Hurt it!" cried the Counsellor; "nay, we shall do it good, my dear. It will help to raise the cream; and you may take my word for it, young maiden, none can do good in this world without in turn receiving it." Pronouncing this great sentiment, he looked so grand and benevolent that Annie, as she said afterwards, could scarce forbear from kissing him, yet feared to take the liberty. Therefore, she only ran away to fetch my Lorna's necklace.

Now as luck would have it—whether good luck or otherwise, you must not judge too hastily—my darling had taken it into her head, only a day or two before, that I was far too valuable to be

trusted with her necklace. Now that she had some idea of its price and quality, she had begun to fear that some one might form designs against my health to win the bauble from me. So, with many pretty coaxings, she had led me to give it up; which, except for her own sake, I was glad enough to do, misliking a charge of such importance.

Therefore Annie found it sparkling in the little secret hole near the head of Lorna's bed, which she herself had recommended for its safer custody; and without a word to any one she brought it down, and danced it in the air before the Counsellor for him to admire its lustre.

"Oh, that old thing!" said the gentleman, in a tone of some contempt; "I remember that old thing well enough. However, for want of a better, no doubt it will answer our purpose. Three times three, I pass it over. Crinkleum, crankum, grass and clover! What are you feared of, you silly child?"

"Good sir, it is perfect witchcraft! I am sure of that, because it rhymes. Oh, what would mother say to me? Shall I ever go to heaven again? Oh, I see the cream already!"

"To be sure you do; but you must not look, or the whole charm will be broken, and the devil will fly away with the pan, and drown every cow you have."

"Oh, sir, it is too horrible. How could you lead me to such a sin? Away with thee, Witch of Endor!"

For the door began to creak, and a broom appeared suddenly in the opening, with our Betty, no doubt, behind it. But Annie, in the greatest terror, slammed the door and bolted it and then turned again to the Counsellor; yet, looking at his face, had not the courage to reproach him. For his eyes rolled like two blazing barrels, and his white shagged brows were knit across them, and his forehead scowled in black furrows, so that Annie said that if she ever saw the devil, she saw him then, and no mistake. Whether the old man wished to scare her, or whether he was trying not to laugh, is more than I can tell you.

"Now," he said, in a deep, stern whisper, "not a word of this to living soul; neither must you nor any other enter this place for three hours at least. By that time the charm will have done its work; the pan will be cream to the bottom, and you will bless

me for a secret which will make your fortune. Put the bauble under this pannikin which none must lift for a day and night. Have no fear, my simple wench; not a breath of harm shall come to you, if you obey my orders."

"Oh, that I will, sir, that I will; if you only tell me what to do."

"Go to your room, without so much as a single word to any one. Bolt yourself in, and for three hours now, read the Lord's Prayer backwards."

Poor Annie was only too glad to escape upon these conditions, and the Counsellor kissed her upon the forehead, and told her not to make her eyes red, because they were much too sweet and pretty. She dropped them at this, with a sob and a courtesy, and ran away to her bedroom; but as for reading the Lord's Prayer backwards, that was much beyond her, and she had not done three words quite right before the three hours expired.

Meanwhile the Counsellor was gone. He bade our mother adieu, with so much dignity of bearing and such warmth of gratitude that when he was gone dear mother fell back on the chair which he had used last night, as if it would teach her the graces. And for more than an hour she made believe not to know what there was for dinner.

"Oh, the wickedness of the world! Oh, the lies that are told of people—or rather, I mean the falsehoods—because a man is better born, and has better manners! Why, Lorna, how is it, that you never speak about your charming uncle? Did you notice, Lizzie, how his silver hair was waving upon his velvet collar and how white his hands were and every nail like an acorn, only pink like shell fish, or, at least, like shells? And the way he bowed and dropped his eyes from his pure respect for me! And then, that he would not even speak on account of his emotion, but pressed my hand in silence! Oh, Lizzie, you have read me beautiful things about Sir Gallyhead, and the rest, but nothing to equal Sir Counsellor."

"You had better marry him, madam," said I, coming in very sternly—though I knew I ought not to say it; "he can repay your adoration. He has stolen a hundred thousand pounds."

"John," cried my mother, "you are mad!" And yet she

turned as pale as death, for women are so quick at turning and she inkled what it was.

"Of course I am, mother, mad about the marvels of Sir Galahad. He has gone off with my Lorna's necklace. Fifty farms like ours can never make it good to Lorna."

Hereupon ensued grim silence. Mother looked at Lizzie's face, for she could not look at me; and Lizzie looked at me, to know; and as for me, I could have stamped almost on the heart of any one. It was not the value of the necklace—I am not so low a hound as that—it was the thought of Lorna's sorrow for her ancient plaything; and, even more, my fury at the breach of hospitality.

But Lorna came up to me softly, as a woman should always come; and she laid one hand upon my shoulder; and she only looked at me. She even seemed to fear to look, and dropped her eyes, and sighed at me.

"Darling John, did you want me to think that you cared for my money more than for me?"

I led her away from the rest of them, being desirous of explaining things, when I saw the depth of her nature opened, like an everlasting well, to me. But she would not let me say a word, or do anything by ourselves, as it were; she said, "Your duty is to your mother; this blow is on her and not on me."

I saw that she was right, though how she knew it is beyond me, and I asked her just to go in front and bring my mother round a little. For I must let my passion pass; it may drop its weapons quickly, but it cannot come and go before a man has time to think.

Then Lorna went up to my mother, who was still in the chair of elegance, and she took her by both hands, and said:

"Dearest mother, I shall fret so if I see you fretting. And to fret will kill me, mother. They have always told me so."

Poor mother bent on Lorna's shoulder, without thought of attitude, and laid her cheek on Lorna's breast, and sobbed till Lizzie was jealous and came with two pocket-handkerchiefs. As for me, my heart was lighter than it had been since the day on which Tom Faggus discovered the value of that blessed and cursed necklace. None could say that I wanted Lorna for her money now. And perhaps the Doones would let me have her, now that her property was gone.

But who shall tell of Annie's grief? The poor little thing would have staked her life upon finding the trinket, in all its beauty, lying under the pannikin. She proudly challenged me to lift it—which I had done long ere that, of course—if only I would take the risk of the spell for my incredulity. I told her not to talk of spells until she could spell a word backwards, and then to look into the pan where the charmed cream should be. She would not acknowledge that the cream was the same as all the rest was; and indeed it was not quite the same, for the points of poor Lorna's diamonds had made a few star-rays across the rich firm crust of yellow.

But when we raised the pannikin, and there was nothing under it, poor Annie fell against the wall which had been whitened lately, and her face put all the white to scorn. My love, who was as fond of her as if she had known her for fifty years, hereupon ran up and caught her, and abused all diamonds.

CHAPTER XXXI

JEREMY FINDS OUT SOMETHING

THAT same night Master Jeremy Stickles, of whose absence the Counsellor must have known, came back with all equipment ready for the grand attack. Now the Doones knew quite as well as we did that this attack was threatening, and that but for the wonderful weather it would have been made long ago. Therefore we, or at least our people, were sure to meet with a good resistance and due preparation.

It was very strange that now some hundreds of country people, who feared to whisper so much as a word against the Doones a year ago, and would sooner have thought of attacking a church in service time than Glen Doone, sharpened their old cutlasses, and laid pitchforks on the grindstone, and bragged at every village cross, as if each would kill ten Doones himself neither care to wipe his hands afterwards. And this fierce bravery and tall contempt had been growing ever since the news of the attack upon our premises had taken good people by surprise.

But stranger still, was the tale Jeremy had to tell me.

"My son," said Jeremy Stickles after supper, with a good pull at his pipe, because he was going to talk so much, and putting his legs well along in the settle, "I was riding on from Dulverton, and it was late in the afternoon, and I was growing weary. The road turned suddenly down from the higher land to the very brink of the sea; and rounding a little jut of cliff I met the roar of the breakers. My horse was scared and leaped aside, for a northerly wind was piping and driving hunks of foam across, as children scatter snowballs. But he only sank to his fetlocks in the dry sand piled with pop-weed; and I tried to make him face the waves; and then I looked about me.

"Watchett town was not to been on account of a little foreland, a mile or more upon my course and standing to the right of me. There was room enough below the cliffs for horse and man

to get along, although the tide was running high with a northerly gale to back it. But close at hand and in the corner, drawn above the yellow sands and long eyebrows of wrack-weed, as snug a little house blinked on me as ever I saw, or wished to see.

"I do assure you that my view of that little house, and the way the lights were twinkling, so different from the cold and darkness of the rolling sea, moved me. I thought to myself how snug it was, and how beautifully I could sleep there. And so I made the old horse draw hand, which he was only too glad to do, and we clomb above the spring-tide mark and over a little piece of turf, and struck the door of the hostelry. Some one came and peeped at me through the lattice overhead, which was full of bulls' eyes; and then the bolt was drawn back, and a woman met me very courteously. A dark and foreign-looking woman, very hot of blood, I doubt, but not altogether a bad one. And she waited for me to to be first to speak, which an Englishwoman would not have done.

"Can I rest here for the night?" I asked, with a lift of my hat to her, for she was no provincial dame who would stare at me for the courtesy, "my horse is weary from the sloughs, and myself but little better; besides that, we both are famished."

"'Yes sir, you can rest and welcome. But of food, I fear, there is but little, unless of the common order. Our fishers would have drawn the nets, but the waves were violent. However, we have—what you call it? .I never can remember, it is so hard to say—the flesh of the hog salted.'

" 'Bacon!' said I: 'what can be better? And half a dozen eggs with it, and a quart of fresh-drawn ale. You make me rage with hunger, madam. Is it cruelty, or hospitality?'

" 'Ah, good!' she replied, with a merry smile, full of Southern sunshine: 'you are not of the men round here; you can think, and you can laugh!'

" 'And most of all, I can eat, good madam. In that way I shall astonish you, even more than by my intellect.'

"She laughed aloud and swung her shoulders as your natives cannot do; and then she called a little maid to lead my horse to stable. However, I preferred to see that matter done myself, and told her to send the little maid for the frying-pan and the egg-box.

"Whether it were my natural wit and elegance of manner; or whether it were my London freedom and knowledge of the world; or my ready appetite and appreciation of garlic, I leave you to decide, John; but perhaps all three combined to recommend me to the graces of my charming hostess.

"I became desirous to know by what strange hazard a clever and a handsome woman, as she must have been some day, could have settled here in this lonely inn, with only the waves for company, and a boorish husband who slaved all day in turning a potter's wheel at Watchett. And what was the meaning of the emblem set above her doorway, a very unattractive cat sitting in a ruined tree?

"However, I had not very long to strain my curiosity, for when she found out who I was and how I held the king's commission, and might be called an officer, her desire to tell me all was more than equal to mine of hearing it. Many and many a day she had longed for some one both skillful and trustworthy, most of all for some one bearing warrant from a court of justice. But the magistrates of the neighborhood would have nothing to say to her, declaring that she was a crack-brained woman, and a wicked, and a foreign one.

"By birth she was an Italian from the mountains of Apulia, who had gone to Rome to seek her fortunes. Her Christian name was Benita. Being a quick and active girl and resolved to work, she found employment in a large hotel; and, rising gradually, began to send money to her parents. And here she might have thriven well, and married well under sunny skies, and been a happy woman, but that some black day sent thither a rich and noble English family, eager to behold the Pope. It was not, however, their fervent longing for the Holy Father which had brought them to St. Peter's roof; but rather their own bad luck in making their home too hot to hold them. For although in the main good Catholics, and pleasant receivers of anything, one of their number had given offence by the folly of trying to think for himself. Some bitter feud had been among them, Benita knew not how it was; and the sister of the nobleman who had died quite lately was married to the rival claimant, whom they all detested. It was something about dividing land; Benita knew not what.

"But this Benita did know, that they were all great people, and rich, and very liberal; so that when they offered to take her to attend to the children and to speak the language for them, and to comfort the lady she was only too glad to go, little foreseeing the end of it. Moreover, she loved the children so, from their pretty ways and that, and the things they gave her, and the style of their dresses, that it would have broken her heart almost never to see the dears again.

"And so, in a very evil hour, she accepted the service of the noble Englishman, and sent her father an old shoe filled to the tongue with money, and trusted herself to fortune. But even before she went she knew that it could not turn out well; for the laurel leaf which she threw on the fire would not crackle even once, and the horn of the goat came wrong in the twist, and the heel of her foot was shining. This made her sigh at the starting-time, and after that what could you hope for?

"However, at first all things went well. My lord was as gay as gay could be, and never would come inside the carriage when a decent horse could he get to ride. He would gallop in front at a reckless pace without a weapon of any kind, delighted with the pure blue air, and throwing his heart around him. Benita had never seen any man so admirable and so childish. He was as innocent as an infant, and not only contented but noisily happy with anything. Only other people must share his joy; and the shadow of sorrow scattered it, though it were but the shade of poverty.

"Here Benita wept a little; and I liked her none the less, and believed her ten times more, in virtue of a tear or two.

"And so they travelled through Northern Italy and throughout the south of France, making their way sometimes in coaches, sometimes in carts, sometimes upon mule-back, sometimes even a-foot and weary; but always as happy as could be. The children laughed, and grew, and throve, especially the young lady, the elder of the two, and Benita began to think that omens must not be relied upon. But suddenly her faith in omens was confirmed forever.

"My lord, who was quite a young man still, and laughed at English arrogance, rode on in front of his wife and friends to catch the first of a famous view on the French side of the Pyrenee hills. He kissed his hand to his wife, and said that he would save her the

trouble of coming. For those two were so in one that they could make each other know whatever he or she had felt. And so my lord went round the corner, with a fine young horse leaping up at the steps.

"They waited for him, long and long; but he never came again; and within a week his mangled body lay in a little chapel-yard.

"My lady dwelt for six months more, scarcely able to believe that all her fright was not a dream. She would not wear a piece or shape of any mourning-clothes; she would not have a person cry, or any sorrow among us. She simply disbelieved the thing, and trusted God to right it.

"For when the snow came down in autumn on the roots of the Pyrenees, and the chapel-yard was white with it, many people told the lady that it was time for her to go. So at the end of October, when wolves came down to the farm-lands, the little English family went home towards their England.

"They landed somewhere on the Devonshire coast, ten or eleven years agone, and stayed some days at Exeter; and set out thence in a hired coach, without any proper attendance, for Watchett in the north of Somerset. For the lady owned a quiet mansion in the neighborhood of that town, and her one desire was to find refuge there and to meet her lord, who was sure to come, she said. Therefore, with only two serving-men and two maids, including Benita, the party set forth from Exeter and lay the first night at Bampton.

"On the following morn they started bravely with earnest hope of arriving at their journey's end by daylight. But the roads were soft and very deep, and the sloughs were out in places; and the heavy coach broke down in the axle and needed mending at Dulverton; and so they lost three hours or more and would have been wiser to sleep there. But her ladyship would not hear of it; she must be home that night, she said, and her husband would be waiting. How could she keep him waiting now, after such a long, long time?

"Therefore, although it was afternoon, and the year now come to December, the horses were put to again, and the heavy coach went up the hill, with the lady and her two children and Benita sitting inside of it, the other maid and two serving-men,

each man with a great blunderbuss, mounted upon the outside; and upon the horses three Exeter postilions.

"Through the fog and through the muck the coach went on, as best it might; sometimes foundered in a slough with half of the horses splashing it, and sometimes knuckled up on a bank, and straining across the middle while all the horses kicked at it. However they went on till dark as well as might be expected. But when they came, all thanking God, to the pitch and slope of the sea-bank, leading on towards Watchett town, and where my horse had shied so there, as Benita said, they met their fate and could not fly it.

"Although it was past the dusk of day, the silver light from the sea flowed in, and showed the cliffs, and the gray sand-line, and the drifts of wreck, and wrack-weed. It showed them also a troop of horsemen, waiting under a rock hard by, and ready to dash upon them. The postilions lashed towards the sea, and the horses strove in the depth of sand, and the serving-men cocked their blunderblusses and cowered away behind them; but the lady stood up in the carriage bravely, and neither screamed nor spoke, but hid her son behind her. Meanwhile the drivers drove into the sea till the leading horses were swimming.

"But before the waves came into the coach, a score of fierce men were round it. They cursed the postilions for mad cowards, and cut the traces, and seized the wheel-horses, all wild with dismay in the wet and the dark. Then, while the carriage was heeling over and well-nigh upset in the water, the lady exclaimed, 'I know that man! He is our ancient enemy;' and Benita, foreseeing that all their boxes would be turned inside out, or carried away, snatched the most valuable of the jewels, a magnificent necklace of diamonds, and cast it over the little girl's head, and buried it under her travelling-cloak, hoping so to save it. Then a great wave, crested with foam, rolled in, and the coach was thrown on its side, and the sea rushed in at the top and the windows, upon shrieking, and clashing, and fainting away.

"What followed Benita knew not, as one might well suppose, herself being stunned by a blow on the head, besides being palsied with terror. 'See, I have the mark now,' she said, 'where the jamb of the door came down on me!' But when she recovered her senses

Before the waves came into the coach, a score of fierce men were around it.

she found herself lying upon the sand, the robbers were out of sight, and one of the serving-men was bathing her forehead with sea-water. For this she rated him well, having taken already too much of that article; and then she arose and ran to her mistress, who was sitting upright on a little rock, with her dead boy's face to her bosom, sometimes gazing upon him, and sometimes questing round for the other one.

"Although there were torches and links around, and she looked at her child by the light of them, no one dared to approach the lady, or speak, or try to help her. Each man whispered his fellow to go, but each hung back himself and muttered that it was too awful to meddle with. And there she would have sat all night, with the fine little fellow stone dead in her arms, and her tearless eyes dwelling upon him, and her heart but not her mind thinking, only that the Italian woman stole up softly to her side, and whispered, 'It is the will of God.'

" 'So it always seems to be,' were all the words the mother answered; and then she fell on Benita's neck; and the men were ashamed to be near her weeping; and a sailor lay down and bellowed. Surely these men are the best.

"Before the light of the morning came along the tide to Watchett my lady had met her husband. They took her into the town that night, but not to her own castle. The lady, whom all people loved, lies in Watchett's little churchyard, with her son and heir at her right hand."

"And what was the lady's name?" I asked, "and what became of the little girl? And why did the woman stay there?"

"Well!" cried Jeremy Stickles, "Benita stayed in that blessed place, because she could not get away from it. The Doones—if Doones indeed they were, about which you, of course, know best—took every stiver out of the carriage, wet or dry they took it. And Benita could never get her wages, for the whole affair is in chancery, and they have appointed a receiver."

"Whew!" said I, knowing something of London, and sorry for Benita's chance.

"So the poor thing was compelled to drop all thought of Apulia, and settle down on the brink of Exmoor, where you get all its evils without the good to balance them. She married a man

who turned a wheel for making the blue Watchett ware, partly because he could give her a house, and partly because he proved himself a good soul towards my lady. There they are, and have three children; and there you may go and visit them."

"I understand all that, Jeremy, though you do tell things too quickly, and I would rather have John Fry's style, for he leaves one time for his words to melt. Now for my second question. What became of the little maid?"

"You great oaf!" cried Jeremy Stickles, "you are rather more likely to know, I should think, than any one else in all the kingdoms. As certain sure as I stand here, that little maid is Lorna Doone."

CHAPTER XXXII

MUTUAL DISCOMFITURE

WHEN Jeremy Stickles described the heavy coach and the persons in and upon it, and the breaking-down at Dulverton, and the place of their destination, as well as the time and the weather and the season of the year, my heart began to burn within me, and my mind replaced the pictures; first of the foreign lady's-maid by the pump, and then of the coach struggling up the hill, and the beautiful dame, and the fine little boy with the white cockade in his hat; but most of all the little girl, dark-haired and very lovely, and having even in those days the rich, soft look of Lorna.

But when he spoke of the necklace thrown over the head of the little maiden and of her disappearance, before my eyes arose at once the flashing of the beacon-fire and the lonely moors embrowned with light, the tramp of the outlaw cavalcade, and the helpless child head-downward lying across the robber's saddle-bow. Then I remembered my own mad shout of boyish indignation, and marvelled at the strange, long way by which the events of life come round.

Jeremy Stickles was quite decided—and, of course, the discovery being his, he had a right to be so—that not a word of all these things must be imparted to Lorna herself, or even to my mother, or any one whatever. "Keep it tight as wax, my lad," he cried, with a wink of great expression: "this belongs to me, mind, and the credit, ay, and the premium, and the right of discount, are altogether mine."

Jeremy's "yellow boys," as he called the Somersetshire trained bands, were even now coming down the valley from the "London road," as every one, since I went up to town, grandly entitled the lane to the moors. There was one good point about these men, that, having no discipline at all, they made pretense to none whatever. Nay, rather they ridiculed the thing, as below men of any spirit. On the other hand, Master Stickles's troopers looked down

on these native fellows from a height from which I hope they may never tumble, for it would break the necks of all of them.

The yellow and the reds together numbered a hundred and twenty men, most of whom slept in our barns and stacks; and besides these we had fifteen troopers of the regular army. You may suppose that all the country was turned upside down about it; and the folk who came to see them drill—by no means a needless exercise—were a greater plague than the soldiers. Therefore all of us were right glad when Jeremy Stickles gave orders to march toward the Doone Glen, and we began to try to do it. The parish choir came part of the way, and the singing-loft from Countisbury; and they kept our soldiers' spirits up with some of the most pugnacious psalms. Parson Bowden marched ahead, leading all our van and file as against the Papists, and promising to go with us till we came to bullet distance. Therefore we marched bravely on, and children came to look at us. And I wondered where Uncle Reuben was, who ought to have led the culverins if Stickles could only have found him.

The culverins were laid on bark and all our horses pulling them, and looking round every now and then with their ears curved up and their noses tossing anxiously, to know what sort of plough it was man had been pleased to put behind them. However, they pulled their very best, and the culverins went up the hill without smack of whip or swearing.

It had been arranged, very justly, no doubt, and quite in keeping with the spirit of the constitution, but, as it proved, not too wisely, that either body of men should act in its own county only. So, when we reached the top of the hill, the sons of Devon marched on and across the track leading into Doone-gate, so as to fetch round the western side, and attack with their culverin from the cliffs whence the sentry had challenged me on the night of my passing the entrance. Meanwhile the yellow lads were to stay upon the eastern highland, whence Uncle Reuben and myself had reconnoiterd so long ago; and whence I had leaped into the valley at the time of the great snow-drifts. And here they were not to show themselves, but keep their culverin in the woods until their cousins of Devon appeared on the opposite parapet of the glen.

The third culverin was intrusted to the fifteen troopers, who

with ten picked soldiers from either trained band, making in all five-and-thirty men, were to assault the Doone-gate itself, while the outlaws were placed between two fires from the eastern cliff and the western. And with this force went Jeremy Stickles, and with it went myself, as knowing more about the passage than any other stranger did. The Doones must repulse at once three simultaneous attacks from an army numbering in the whole one hundred and thirty-five men, not including the Devonshire officers, fifty men on each side, I mean, and thirty-five at the head of the valley.

Now we five-and-thirty men lay back a little way round the hollow of the track which leads to the strong Doone-gate. Our culverin was in among us, loaded now to the muzzle, and it was not comfortable to know that it might go off at any time. Although the yeomanry were not come, some of us had horses there, besides the horses who dragged the cannon, and now were sniffing at it. And there were plenty of spectators to mind these horses for us, as soon as we should charge; inasmuch as all our friends and neighbors, who had so keenly prepared for the battle, now resolved to take no part, but look on and praise the winners.

At last we heard the loud bang-bang which proved that Devon and Somerset were pouring their indignation hot into the den of malefactors, or, at least, so we supposed; therefore at double quick march we advanced round the bend of the cliff which had hidden us, hoping to find the gate undefended, and to blow down all barriers with the fire of our cannon. And, indeed, it seemed likely at first to be so, for the wild and mountainous gorge of rock appeared to be all in pure loneliness, except where the colored coats of our soldiers and their metal trappings shone with the sun behind them. Therefore we shouted a loud hurrah, as for an easy victory.

But while the sound of our cheer rang back among the crags above us, a shrill, clear whistle cleft the air for a single moment, and then a dozen carbines bellowed, and all among us flew murderous lead. Several of our men rolled over, but the rest rushed on like Britons, Jeremy and myself in front, while we heard the horses plunging at the loaded gun behind us. "Now, my lads," cried Jeremy, "one dash, and we are beyond them!" For he saw that the foe was overhead in the gallery of brushwood.

Our men with a brave shout answered him, for his courage was fine example, and we leaped in under the feet of the foe before they could load their guns again. But here, when the foremost among us were past, an awful crash rang behind us, with the shrieks of men, and the din of metal, and the horrible screaming of horses. The trunk of the tree had been launched overhead and crashed into the very midst of us. Our cannon was under it, so were two men, and a horse with his poor back broken. Another horse vainly struggled to rise, with his thighbone smashed and protruding.

Now I lost all presence of mind at this, for I loved both those good horses, and shouting for any to follow me, dashed headlong into the cavern. Some five or six men came after me, the foremost of whom was Jeremy, when a storm of shot whistled and pattered around me with a blaze of light and a thunderous roar. On I leaped, like a madman, and pounced on one gunner and hurled him across his culverin; but the others had fled, and a heavy oak door fell to with a bang behind them. So utterly were my senses gone, and nought but strength remaining, that I caught up the cannon with both hands and dashed it, breech first, at the doorway. The solid oak burst with the blow, and the gun stuck fast like a builder's putlog.

But here I looked round in vain for any to come and follow up my success. The scanty light showed me no figure moving through the length of the tunnel behind me; only a heavy groan or two went to my heart and chilled it. So I hurried back to seek Jeremy, fearing that he must be smitten down.

And so, indeed, I found him, as well as three other poor fellows, struck by the charge of the culverin which had passed so close beside me. Two of the four were as dead as stones, and growing cold already, but Jeremy and the other could manage to groan just now and then. So I turned my attention to them, and thought no more of fighting.

Having so many wounded men and so many dead among us, we loitered at the cavern's mouth and looked at one another, wishing only for somebody to come and take command of us. But no one came; and I was grieved so much about poor Jeremy, besides being wholly unused to any violence of bloodshed, that I could only keep his head up, and try to stop him from bleeding.

The shot had taken him in the mouth, about that no doubt could be, for two of his teeth were in his beard, and one of his lips was wanting. I laid his shattered face on my breast, and nursed him as a woman might. But he looked at me with a jerk at this, and I saw that he wanted coolness.

While here we stayed, quite out of danger, for the fellows from the gallery could by no means shoot us, even if they remained there, and the oaken door whence the others fled was blocked up by the culverin, a boy, who had no business there, being, in fact, our clerk's apprentice to the art of shoe-making, came round the corner upon us with a sudden rush and a sidelong step and an impudence—

"Got the worst of it!" cried the boy; "better be off, all of you. Zomerzett and Devon a vighting, and the Doones have drashed 'em both. Maister Ridd, even thee be drashed."

We few, who yet remained of the force which was to have won the Doone-gate, gazed at one another like so many fools, and nothing more. For we still had some faint hopes of winning the day and recovering our reputation, by means of what the other men might have done without us. And we could not understand at all how Devonshire and Somerset, being embarked in the same cause, should be fighting with one another.

Finding nothing more to be done in the way of carrying on the war, we laid poor Master Stickles and two more of the wounded upon the carriage of bark and hurdles whereon our gun had lain; and we rolled the gun into the river, and harnessed the horses yet alive, and put the others out of their pain, and sadly wended homewards, feeling ourselves to be thoroughly beaten yet ready to maintain that it was no fault of ours whatever. And in this opinion the women joined, being only too glad and thankful to see us come home alive again.

Now, this enterprise having failed so, I prefer not to dwell too long upon it; only just to show the mischief which lay at the root of the failure. And this mischief was the vile jealousy betwixt red and yellow uniform. Now I try to speak impartially, belonging no more to Somerset than I do to Devonshire, living upon the borders, and born of either county.

The men of Devon, who bore red facings, had a long way to

go round the hills before they could get into due position on the western side of the Doone Glen. And knowing that their cousins in yellow would claim the whole of the glory if allowed to be first with the firing, these worthy fellows waited not to take good aim with their cannon, seeing the others about to shoot; but fettled it anyhow on the slope, pointing in a general direction, laid the rope to the breach and fired. Now the shot, which was a casual mixture of anything considered hard—for instance, jug-bottoms and knobs of doors—the whole of this pernicious dose came scattering and shattering among the unfortunate yellow men upon the opposite cliff, killing one and wounding two.

Now, what did the men of Somerset do, but instead of waiting for their friends to send round and beg pardon, train their gun full mouth upon them, and with a vicious meaning shoot. Not only this, but they loudly cheered when they saw four or five red coats lie low; for which savage feeling not even the remarks of the Devonshire men concerning their coats could entirely excuse them. Now, I need not tell the rest of it. Enough that both sides waxed hotter and hotter with the fire of destruction.

At last the Doones, who must have laughed at the thunder passing overhead, recalling their men from the gallery, issued out of Gwenny's gate, which had been wholly overlooked, and fell on the rear of the Somerset men, and slew four beside their cannon. Then, while the survivors ran away, the outlaws took the hot culverin and rolled it down into their valley. Thus, of the three guns set forth that morning, only one ever came home again, and that was the gun of the Devonshire men, who dragged it home themselves, with the view of making a boast about it.

This was a melancholy end of our brave setting-out, and everybody blamed every one else, and several of us wanted to have the whole thing over again as then we must have righted it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GETTING INTO CHANCERY

TWO of the Devonshire officers, Captains Pyke and Dallan, now took command of the men who were left, and ordered all to go home again, commending much the bravery which had been displayed on all sides, and the loyalty to the king and the English constitution. This last word always seems to me to settle everything when said, because nobody understands it, and yet all can puzzle their neighbors. So the Devonshire men, having beans to sow went home; and our Somerset friends only stayed for two days more to backbite them.

Jeremy Stickles lay and tossed, and thrust up his feet in agony, and bit with his lipless mouth the clothes, and was proud to see blood upon them. He looked at us ever so many times, as much as to say, "Fools, let me die; then I shall have some comfort." But we nodded at him sagely, especially the women, trying to convey to him on no account to die yet. And then we told one another, on purpose for him to hear us, how brave he was, and not the man to knock under in a hurry, and how he should have the victory yet; and how well he looked, considering.

These things cheered him, a little now, and a little more next time; and every time we went on so, he took it with less impatience. Then, once, when he had been very quiet, and not even tried to frown at us, Annie leaned over and kissed his forehead, and spread the pillows and sheet with a curve as delicate as his own white ears; and then he feebly lifted hands, and prayed to God to bless her. And after that he came round gently; though never to the man he had been, and never to speak loud again.

To myself Jeremy's wound was a great misfortune in more ways than one. In the first place, it deferred my chance of imparting either to my mother or to Mistress Lorna my firm belief that the maid I loved was not sprung from the race which had slain my father; neither could he in any way have offended against her family. And this discovery I was yearning more and more to de-

clare to them, being forced to see that a certain difference because of the memory of my father's death was growing betwixt them both, and betwixt them and me.

And so dear mother and darling Lorna now had been for many a day thinking, worrying, and wearing about the matter between us. Neither liked to look at the other as they used to do; with mother admiring Lorna's eyes and grace and form of breeding; and Lorna loving mother's goodness, softness, and simplicity. And the saddest and most hurtful thing was that neither could ask the other of the shadow falling between them. And so it went on and deepened.

In the next place, Colonel Stickles's illness was a grievous thing to us, in that we had no one now to command the troopers. Ten of these were still alive, and so well approved to us that they could never fancy aught, whether for dinner or supper, without its being forth coming. If they wanted trout they should have it; if colloped venison, or broiled ham and salmon from Lynmouth and Trentisoe, or truffles from the woodside, all these were at the warriors' service until they lusted for something else. Even the wounded men ate nobly; all except poor Jeremy, who was forced to have a young elder-shoot with the pith drawn to feed him. And once, when they wanted pickled loach from my description of it, I took up my boyish sport again, and pronged them a good jarful. Therefore none of them could complain; and yet they were not satisfied, perhaps for want of complaining.

Be that as it might, we knew that if they once resolved to go all our house and all our goods, ay, and our own precious lives, would and must be at the mercy of embittered enemies. For now the Doones, having driven back, as every one said, five hundred men—though not thirty had ever fought with them—were in such feather all round the country that nothing was too good for them. Offerings poured in at the Doone-gate faster than Doones could away with them; and the sympathy both of Devon and Somerset became almost oppressive. And perhaps this wealth of congratulation, and mutual good feeling between plunderer and victim, saved us from any piece of spite; kindliness having won the day, and every one loving every one.

But yet another cause arose, and this the strongest one of all,

to prove the need of Stickles's aid and the calamity of his illness. For two men appeared at our gate one day, stripped to their shirts and void of horses and looking very sorrowful. Now, having some fear of attack from the Doones, and scarce knowing what their tricks might be, we received these strangers cautiously, desiring to know who they were before we let them see all our premises.

However, it soon became plain to us that although they might not be honest fellows, at any rate they were not Doones; and so we took them in, and fed, and left them to tell their business. And this they were glad enough to do, as men who have been maltreated almost always are. And it was not for us to contradict them, lest our victuals should go amiss.

These two very worthy fellows—nay, more than that by their own account, being downright martyrs—were come, for the public benefit, from the Court of Chancery, sitting for everybody's good and boldly redressing evil. This court has a power of scent unknown to the common-law practitioners, and slowly yet surely tracks its game; even as the great lumbering dogs, now introduced from Spain, and called by some people "pointers," differ from the swift gaze-hound, who sees his prey and runs him down in the manner of the common lawyers.

Now, as it fell in a very black day, his majesty's Court of Chancery gained scent of poor Lorna's life, and of all that might be made out of it. Whether through that brave young lord who ran into such peril, or through any of his friends; or whether through that deep old Counsellor, whose game none might penetrate; or through any disclosures of the Italian woman, or even of Jeremy himself, none just now could tell us; only this truth was too clear—Chancery had heard of Lorna, and then had seen how rich she was; and never delaying in one thing, had opened mouth and swallowed her.

The Doones, with a share of that dry humor which was in them hereditary, had welcomed the two men and led them kindly down the valley, and told them then to serve their writ. Misliking the look of things, these poor men began to fumble among their clothes; upon which the Doones cried, "Off with them! Let us see if your message be on your skins." And with no more manners than that, they stripped and lashed them out of the valley; only bidding them

to come to us if they wanted Lorna Doone, and to us they came accordingly. Neither were they sure at first but what we should treat them so, for they had no knowledge of west country, and thought it quite a godless place wherein no writ was holy.

We, however, comforted and cheered them so considerably that, in gratitude, they showed their writs, to which they had stuck like leeches. And these were twofold: one addressed to Mistress Lorna Doone, so called, and bidding her keep in readiness to travel whenever called upon and commit herself to nobody except the accredited messengers of the right honorable court; while the other was addressed to all subjects of his majesty having custody of Lorna Doone or any power over her. And this last both threatened and exhorted, and held out hopes of recompense if she were rendered truly.

My mother and I held consultation over both these documents, with a mixture of some wrath and fear, and a fork of great sorrow to stir them. And now, having Jeremy Stickles's leave, which he gave with a nod when I told him all, and at last made him understand it, I laid bare to my mother as well what I knew as what I merely surmised or guessed, concerning Lorna's parentage. All this she received with great tears and wonder and fervent thanks to God, and still more fervent praise of her son, who had nothing whatever to do with it. However, now the question was how to act about these writs. And herein it was most unlucky that we could not have Master Stickles, with his knowledge of the world and especially of the law-courts, to advise us what to do, and to help in doing it.

Then I said, "Now we are bound to tell Lorna, and to serve her citation upon her which these good fellows have given us."

"Then go and do it thyself, my son," mother replied, with a mournful smile, misdoubting what the end might be. So I took the slip of brown parchment, and went to seek my darling.

Lorna was in her favorite place, the little garden which she tended with such care and diligence. Seeing how the maiden loved it and was happy there, I had labored hard to fence it from the dangers of the wood. And here she had corrected me, with better taste, and sense of pleasure, and the joys of musing. For I meant to shut out the brook and build my fence inside of it; but Lorna said

no—if we must have a fence, which could not but be injury, at any rate leave the stream inside, and a pleasant bank beyond it.

And soon I perceived that she was right, though not so much as afterwards, for the fairest of all things in a garden, and in summer time most useful, is a brook of crystal water, where a man may come and meditate and the flowers may lean and see themselves and the rays of the sun are reflected. Now, partly with her own white hands, and partly with Gwenny's red ones, Lorna had made of this sunny spot a haven of beauty to dwell in.

Feeling many things, but thinking without much to guide me, over the grass-plats laid between I went up to Lorna. She, in a shower of damask roses, raised her eyes and looked at me. And even now, in those sweet eyes, so deep with loving-kindness and soft maiden dreamings, there seemed to be a slight, unwilling, half-confessed withdrawal; overcome by love and duty, yet a painful thing to see.

"Darling," I said, "are your spirits good? Are you strong enough today to bear a tale of cruel sorrow; but which, perhaps, when your tears are shed, will leave you all the happier?"

"What can you mean?" she answered, trembling, not having been very strong of late, and now surprised at my manner. "Are you come to give me up, John?"

"Not very likely," I replied; "neither do I hope such a thing would leave you all the happier. Oh, Lorna, if you can think that so quickly as you seem to have done, now you have every prospect and strong temptation to it. You are far, far above me in the world, and I have no right to claim you. Perhaps, when you have heard these tidings, you will say, 'John Ridd, begone; your life and mine are parted.'"

"Will I?" cried Lorna, with all the brightness of her playful ways returning. "You very foolish and jealous John, how shall I punish you for this? Am I to forsake every flower I have, and not even know that the world goes round, while I look up at you, the whole day long, and say, 'John, I love, love, love you'?"

During these words she leaned upon me, half in gay imitation of what I so often made her do, and half in depth of earnestness, as the thrice-repeated word grew stronger, and grew warmer, with and to her heart. And as she looked up at the finish, saying "you"

so musically, I was much inclined to clasp her; but, remembering who she was, forbore; at which she seemed surprised with me.

"Mistress Lorna," I replied, with I know not what temptation, making little of her caresses, though more than all my heart to me; "Mistress Lorna, you must keep your rank and proper dignity. You must never look at me with anything but pity now."

"I shall look at you with pity, John," said Lorna, trying to laugh it off, yet not knowing what to make of me, "if you talk any more of this nonsense, knowing me as you ought to do. I shall even begin to think that you and your friends are weary of me, and of so long supporting me, and are only seeking cause to send me back to my old misery. If it be so, I will go. My life matters little to any one." Here the great bright tears arose, but the maiden was too proud to sob.

"Sweetest of all sweet loves," I cried, for the sign of a tear defeated me, "what possibility could make me ever give up Lorna?"

"Dearest of all dears," she answered, "if you dearly love me, what possibility could make me ever give you up, dear?"

Upon that there was no more forbearing, but I kissed and clasped her, whether she were countess, or whether Queen of England; mine she was, at least in heart; and mine she should be wholly. And she being of the same opinion, nothing was said between us.

"Now, Lorna," said I, as she hung on my arm, willing to trust me anywhere, "come to your little plant house and hear my moving story."

"No story can move me much, dear," she answered rather faintly, for any excitement stayed with her; "since I know your strength of kindness, scarcely any tale can move me, unless it be of yourself, love, or of my poor mother."

"It is of your poor mother, darling. Can you bear to hear it?" And yet I wondered why she did not say as much of her father.

"Yes, I can hear anything. But although I cannot see her, and have long forgotten, I could not bear to hear ill of her."

"There is no ill to bear, sweet child, except of evil done to her. Lorna, you are of an ill-starred race."

"Better that than a wicked race," she answered, with her usual

Lorna had made of this place a haven of beauty to dwell in.

—*Page 211*

quickness, leaping at conclusion. "Tell me I am not a Doone, and I will—but I cannot love you more."

"You are not a Doone, my Lorna; for that, at least, I can answer, though I know not what your name is."

"And my father—your father—what I mean is—"

"Your father and mine never met one another. Your father was killed by an accident in the Pyrenean mountains, and your mother by the Doones; or, at least, they caused her death, and carried you away from her."

All this, coming as in one breath upon the sensitive maiden, was more than she could bear all at once, as any but a fool like me must, of course, have known. She lay back on the garden bench, with her black hair shed on the oaken bark, while her color went and came; and only by that and her quivering breast could any one say that she lived and thought. And yet she pressed my hand with hers, that now I might tell her all of it.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JOHN BECOMES TOO POPULAR

WHEN at last my tale was done she turned away and wept bitterly for the sad fate of her parents. But, to my surprise, she spoke not even a word of wrath or rancour. She seemed to take it all as fate.

"Lorna, darling," I said, at length, for men are more impatient in trials of time than women are, "do you not even wish to know what your proper name is?"

"How can it matter to me, John?" she answered, with a depth of grief which made me seem a trifler. "It can never matter now, when there are none to share it."

"Poor little soul!" was all I said, in a tone of purest pity; and, to my surprise, she turned upon me, caught me in her arms, and loved me as she never had done before.

"Dearest, I have you," she cried; "you, and only you, love. Having you, I want no other. All my life is one with yours. Oh, John, how can I treat you so?"

Blushing through the wet of weeping and the gloom of pondering, yet she would not hide her eyes, but folded me and dwelt on me.

"I cannot believe," in the pride of my joy, I whispered into one little ear, "that you could ever so love me, beauty, as to give up the world for me."

"Would you give up your farm for me, John?" cried Lorna, leaping back, and looking with her wondrous power of light at me; "would you give up your mother, your sisters, your home, and all that you have in the world, and every hope of your life, John?"

"Of course I would, without two thoughts. You know it; you know it, Lorna."

"It is true that I do," she answered in a tone of deepest sadness: "and it is this power of your love which has made me love

you so. No good can come of it; no good. God's face is set against selfishness."

As she spoke in that low tone I gazed at the clear lines of her face, not with love and wonder only, but with a strange, new sense of awe.

"Darling," I said, "come nearer to me. Give me surety against that. Never frighten me with the thought that we might be parted."

"Does it, then, so frighten you?" she whispered, coming close to me. "I know it, dear; I have known it long; but it never frightens me. It makes me sad and very lonely, till I can remember—"

"Till you can remember what?" I asked, with a long, deep shudder, for we are so superstitious.

"Until I do remember, love, that you will soon come back to me, and be my own forever. This is what I always think of; this is what I hope for."

"You sweet love," I said, "do you suppose I should be content to leave you until Elysium?"

"How on earth can I tell, dear John, what you will be content with?"

"You, and only you," said I. The whole of it lies in a syllable. Now you know my entire want, and want must be my comfort."

"But surely, if I have money, sir, and birth and rank and all sorts of grandeur, you would never dare to think of me."

She drew herself up with an air of pride, as she gravely pronounced these words, and gave me a scornful glance, or tried; and turned away as if to enter some grand coach or palace; while I was so amazed and grieved, in my raw simplicity, especially after the way in which she had at first received my news that I never said a word, but stared and thought, "How does she mean it?"

She saw the pain upon my forehead and the wonder in my eyes, and leaving coach and palace too, back she flew to me in a moment as simple as simplest milkmaid.

"Oh, you fearfully stupid John, you inexpressibly stupid John," she cried, with both arms round my neck and her lips upon my forehead; "you have called yourself thick-headed, John, and I never would believe it; but now I do with all my heart. Will you never know what I am, love?"

"No, Lorna, that I never shall. I can understand my mother well, and one, at least, of my sisters but you I never understand, only love you all the more for it."

"Then never try to understand me if the result is that, dear John. And yet I am the very simplest of all foolish, simple creatures. Nay, I am wrong; therein I yield the palm to you, dear. To think that I can act so! No wonder they want me in London as an ornament for the stage, John."

Now, in after-days, when I heard of Lorna as the richest and noblest and loveliest lady to be found in London, I often remembered that little scene, and recalled every word and gesture, wondering what lay under it. Even now, while it was quite impossible once to doubt those clear, deep eyes, and the bright lips trembling so; nevertheless, I felt how much the world would have to do with it, and that the best and truest people cannot shake themselves quite free. However, for the moment I was very proud, and showed it.

If Master Stickles should not mend enough to gain his speech a little, and declare to us all he knew, we decided that I was to set out for Watchett, riding upon horseback, and there to hire a cart with wheels, such as we had not begun, as yet, to use on Exmoor.

Now, instead of getting better, Colonel Stickles grew worse and worse, in spite of all our tendance of him, with simples and with nourishment, and no poisonous medicines, such as doctors would have given him. And the fault of this lay not with us, but purely with himself and his unquiet constitution. For he roused himself up to a perfect fever when, through Lizzie's giddiness, he learned the very thing which mother and Annie were hiding from him with the utmost care; namely, that Sergeant Bloxham had taken upon himself to send direct to London, by the Chancery officers, a full report of what had happened, and of the illness of his chief, together with an urgent prayer for a full battalion of king's troops and a plenary commander.

This Sergeant Bloxham, being senior of the surviving soldiers, and a very worthy man in his way, but a trifle over-zealous, had succeeded to the captaincy upon his master's disablement. Then, with desire to serve his country and show his education, he sat up most part of three nights, and wrote this wonderful report by the

aid of our stable lanthorn. It was a very fine piece of work, as three men to whom he read it pronounced, being under seal of secrecy. And all might have gone well with it, if the author could only have held his tongue when near the ears of women. But this was beyond his sense, as it seems, although so good a writer. For, having heard that our Lizzie was a famous judge of literature, he could not contain himself, but must have her opinion upon his work.

Lizzie sat on a log of wood and listened with all her ears up, having made proviso that no one else should be there to interrupt her. And she put in a syllable here and there, and many a time she took out one and then she declared the result so good, and the style to be so elegant, so chaste, and yet so fervent, that the sergeant broke his pipe in three, and fell in love with her on the spot.

That great despatch was sent to London by the Chancery officers, whom we fitted up with clothes and for three days fattened them, which, in strict justice, they needed much. They were kind enough to be pleased with us, and accepted my new shirts generously; and, urgent as their business was, another week could do harm to nobody and might set them upon their legs again. And knowing, although they were London men, that fish do live in water, these two fellows went fishing all day, but never landed anything. However, their holiday was cut short, for the sergeant, having finished now his narrative of proceedings, was not the man to let it hang fire and be quenched, perhaps, by Stickles.

Therefore, having done their business and served both citations, these two good men had a pannier of victuals put up by dear Annie, and, borrowing two of our horses, rode to Dunster, where they left them, and hired on towards London. We had no time to like them much and so we did not miss them, especially in our great anxiety about poor Master Stickles.

Jeremy lay between life and death for at least a fortnight. At last I prevailed upon him that he must get better to save himself from being ignobly and unjustly superseded; and hereupon I reviled Sergeant Bloxham more fiercely than Jeremy's self could have done, and, indeed, to such a pitch that Jeremy almost forgave him and became much milder. And after that his fever and the inflammation of his wound diminished very rapidly.

However, not knowing what might happen, or even how soon

poor Lorna might be taken from our power, and, falling into lawyer's hands, have cause to wish herself most heartily back among the robbers, I set forth one day for Watchett, taking advantage of the visit of some troopers from an outpost, who would make our house quite safe. I rode alone, being fully primed, and having no misgivings. For it was said that even the Doones had begun to fear me since I cast their culverin through the door, and they could not but believe, from my being still untouched in the thickest of their fire, both of gun and cannon, that I must bear a charmed life, proof against ball and bullet.

When I knocked at Benita's little door, whose sill was gritty and grimed with sand, no one came for a long time to answer me or to let me in. Not wishing to be unmannerly, I waited a long time, and watched the sea, from which the wind was blowing and whose many lips of waves—though the tide was half way out—spoke to and refreshed me. After a while I knocked again, for my horse was becoming hungry, and a good while after that again, a voice came through the key-hole:

"Who is it that wishes to enter?"

"The boy who was at the pump," said I, "when the carriage broke down at Dulverton."

"Oh, yes, I remember, certainly. My leetle boy with the fair, white skin. I have desired to see him, oh, many, yes, many times."

She was opening the door while saying this, and then she started back in affright that the little boy should have grown so.

"You cannot be that leetle boy. It is quite impossible. Why do you impose on me?"

"Not only am I that little boy, but also I am come to tell you all about your little girl."

"Come in, you very great leetle boy," she answered, with her dark eyes brightened. And I went in and looked at her. She was altered by time as much as I was. The slight and graceful shape was gone, yet her face was comely still and full of strong intelligence. I gazed at her and she at me, and we were sure of one another.

Madam Benita Odam—for the name of the man who turned the wheel proved to be John Odam—showed me into a little room

containing two chairs and a fir-wood table, and sat down on a three-legged seat and studied me very steadfastly.

Not wanting to talk about myself, I led her back to that fearful night of the day when first I had seen her. She was not desirous to speak of it; however, I drew her gradually to recollection of Lorna, and then of the little boy who died, and the poor mother buried with him. And her strong, hot nature kindled, as she dwelt upon these things, and my wrath waxed within me, and we forgot reserve and prudence under the sense of so vile a wrong. She told me the very same story which she had told to Master Jeremy Stickles.

"Would you know her again?" I asked, being stirred by the accounts of Lorna when she was five years old; "would you know her as a full-grown maiden?"

"I think I should," she answered, "it is not possible to say until one sees the person; but, from the eyes of the little girl, I think that I must know her. Oh, the poor young creature! Is it to be believed that the cannibals devoured her? What a people you are in this country! Meat, meat, meat!"

As she raised her hands and eyes in horror at our carnivorous propensities, to which she clearly attributed the disappearance of Lorna, I could scarce help laughing, even after that sad story. For, though it is said at the present day and will doubtless be said hereafter, that the Doones had devoured a baby once as they came up Porlock hill, after fighting hard in the market-place, I know that the tale was utterly false; for, cruel and brutal as they were, their taste was very correct and choice, and, indeed, one might say, fastidious. Nevertheless, I could not stop to argue that matter with her.

"The little maid has not been devoured," I said to Mistress Odam; "and now she is a tall young lady, and as beautiful as can be. If I sleep in your good hostel to-night, after going to Watchett town, will you come with me to Oare to-morrow and see your little maiden?"

"I would like—and yet I fear. This country is so barbarous. And I am good to eat—there is much picking on my bones!"

She surveyed herself with a glance so mingled of pity and admiration, and the truth of her words was so apparent that I nearly lost good manners. However, at last I made her promise to come

with me on the morrow, presuming that Master Odam could by any means be persuaded to keep her company in the cart, as propriety demanded. Having little doubt that Master Odam was entirely at his wife's command, I looked upon that matter as settled, and set off for Watchett to see the grave of Lorna's poor mother and to hire a cart for the morrow.

I succeeded without any trouble or hindrance in finding a suitable cart; whereas the other matter, in which I could have expected no difficulty, came very near to defeat me. For when I heard that Lorna's father was the Earl of Dugal—as Benita impressed upon me, I never thought but that everybody in Watchett town must know all about the tombstone of the Countess of Dugal.

This, however, proved otherwise. For Lord Dugal had never lived at Watchett Grange, as their place was called, neither had his name become familiar as its owner. The Grange had only devolved to him by will, at the end of a long entail, when the last of the Fitz-Pains died out; and, though he liked the idea of it, he had gone abroad without taking papers. And upon news of his death, John Jones, a rich gentleman from Llandaff, had taken possession as next of right, and hushed up all the story. And though, even at the worst of times, a lady of high rank and wealth could not be robbed and as bad as murdered and then buried in a little place, without moving some excitement, yet it had been given out on purpose and with diligence that this was only a foreign lady, travelling for her health and pleasure along the sea-coast of England.

As the poor thing never spoke, and several of her servants and her baggage looked so foreign, and she herself died in a collar of lace unlike any made in England, all Watchett, without hesitation, pronounced her to be a foreigner. And the English serving-man and maid, who might have cleared up everything, either were bribed by Master Jones, or else decamped of their own accord with the relics of the baggage. So the poor Countess of Dugal, almost in sight of her own grand house, was buried in an unknown grave, with her pair of infants, without a plate, without a tombstone, without a tear, except from the hired Italian woman. Surely my poor Lorna came of an ill-starred family.

As I made inquiries, I was led to every public-house, instead of to the churchyard; and twenty tables were ready for me in lieu

of a single gravestone. "Zummeszett thou bee'st, Jan Ridd, and Zummeszett thou shalt be. Thee carl theezell a Davonsheer man! Whoy, thee lives in Zummerzett; and in Zummerzett thee wast barn, lad." And so it went on, till I was weary, though very much obliged to them.

Dull and solid as I am, and with a wild duck waiting for me at good Mistress Odam's, I saw that there was nothing for it but to yield to these good people, and prove me a man of Somerset by eating a dinner at their expense. As for the churchyard, none would hear of it, and I grieved for broaching the matter.

But how was I to meet Lorna again, without having done the thing of all things which I had promised to see to? It would never do to tell her that so great was my popularity, and so strong the desire to feed me that I could not attend to her mother. Least of all could I say that every one in Watchett knew John Ridd, while none had heard of the Countess of Dugal. And yet that was about the truth, as I hinted very delicately to Mistress Odam that evening.

CHAPTER XXXV

LORNA KNOWS HER NURSE

HAVING obtained from Benita Odam a very close and full description of the place where her poor mistress lay, I hastened to Watchett the following morning, before the sun was up or any people were about. And so, without interruption, I was in the churchyard at sunrise.

In the farthest and darkest nook, overgrown with grass and overhung by a weeping-tree, a little bank of earth betokened the rounding off of a hapless life. There was nothing to tell of rank or wealth, of love, or even pity. Only some unskilful hand, probably Master Odam's under his wife's teaching, had carved a rude L and a ruder D upon a large pebble from the beach, and set it up as a headstone.

I gathered a little grass for Lorna and a sprig of the weeping-tree, and then returned to the "Forest Cat," as Benita's lonely inn was called. For the way is long from Watchett to Oare, and though you may ride it rapidly, as the Doones had done on that fatal night, to travel on wheels with one horse only is a matter of time and of prudence. Therefore, we set out pretty early, three of us and a baby, who could not well be left behind. The wife of the man who owned the cart had undertaken to mind the business and the other babies.

As luck would have it, the first who came to meet us at the gate was Lorna, with nothing whatever upon her head, but her beautiful hair shed round her; and wearing a sweet white frock tucked in, and showing her figure perfectly. In her joy she ran straight up to the cart, and then stopped and gazed at Benita. At one glance her old nurse knew her: "Oh, the eyes, the eyes!" she cried, and was over the rail of the cart in a moment, in spite of all her substance. Lorna, on the other hand, looked at her with some doubt and wonder, as though having right to know much about her and yet unable to do so. But when the foreign woman said some-

thing in Roman language, and flung new hay from the cart upon her, as if in a romp of childhood, the young maid cried, "Oh, Nita, Nita!" and fell upon her breast and wept; and after that looked round at us.

This being so, there could be no doubt as to the power of proving Lady Lorna's birth and rights, both by evidence and token. For though we had not the necklace now, we had the ring of heavy gold, a very ancient relic, with which my maid had pledged herself to me. And Benita knew this ring as well as she knew her own fingers, having heard a long history about it; and the effigy on it of the wild cat was the bearing of the house of Lorne.

For though Lorna's father was a nobleman of high and goodly lineage, her mother was of yet more ancient and renowned descent, being the last in line direct from the great and kingly chiefs of Lorne. A wild and headstrong race they were, and must have everything their own way. Hot blood was ever among them, even of one household; and their sovereignty waned and fell among themselves by continual quarrelling. And it was of a piece with this that the Doones, who were an offset, by the mother's side, should fall out with the Earl of Lorne, the last but one of that title.

The daughter of this nobleman had married Sir Ensor Doone; but this, instead of healing matters, led to fiercer conflict.

Knowing Lorna to be direct in heirship to vast property, and bearing especial spite against the house of which she was the last, the Doones had brought her up with full intention of lawful marriage; and had carefully secluded her from the wildest of their young gallants.

While we were full of all things and wondering what would happen next, or what we ought ourselves to do, another very important matter called for our attention. This was no less than Annie's marriage to Squire Faggus. We had tried to put it off again, for, in spite of all advantages, neither my mother nor myself had any real heart for it. Not that we dwelt upon Tom's shortcomings, or rather, perhaps, his going too far at the time when he worked the road so. All that was covered by the king's pardon and the universal respect of the neighborhood. But our scruple was this—and the more we talked the more it grew upon us—that we both had great misgivings as to his future steadiness.

I fear that all this talk on our part only hurried matters forward, Annie being more determined every time we pitied her. And at last Tom Faggus came, and spoke as if he were on the king's road with a pistol at my head and one at mother's. "No more fast and loose," he cried, "either one thing, or the other. I love the maid, and she loves me; and we will have one another, either with your leave or without it. How many more times am I to dance over these vile hills, and leave my business, and get nothing more than a sigh or a kiss, and 'Tom, I must wait for mother'? You are famous for being straightforward, you Ridds. Just treat me as I would treat you, now."

I looked at my mother, for a glance from her would have sent Tom out of the window; but she checked me with her hand, and said "You have some ground of complaint, sir: I will not deny it. Now I will be as straightforward with you as even a Ridd is supposed to be. My son and myself have all along disliked your marriage with Annie. Not for what you have been, so much as for what we fear you will be. Have patience one moment, if you please. We do not fear your taking to the highway life again; for that you are too clever, no doubt, now that you have property. But we fear that you will take to drinking, and to squandering money. There are many examples of this around us; and we know what the fate of the wife is. It has been hard to tell you this, under our own roof, and with our own—" Here mother hestitated.

"Spirits and cider and beer," I broke in; "out with it, like a Ridd, mother; as he will have all of it."

"Spirits and cider and beer," said mother very firmly after me.

"If ever there was a sober man," cried Tom, "if ever there was in Christendom a man of perfect sobriety, that man is now before you. Shall we say to-morrow week, mother? It will suit your washing-day."

"How very thoughtful you are, Tom! Now, John would never have thought of that, in spite of all his steadiness."

"Certainly not," I answered proudly; "when my time comes for Lorna, I shall not study Betty Muxworthy."

In this way the squire got over us.

When the time for the wedding came, there was such a stir and commotion as had never been known in the parish of Oare since

my father's marriage. For Annie's beauty and kindliness had made her the pride of the neighborhood, and the presents sent her from all round were enough to stock a shop with. Master Stickles, who now could walk, and who certainly owed his recovery to Annie, presented her with a mighty Bible, silver-clasped and very handsome, beating the parson's out and out, and for which he had sent to Taunton. Even the common troopers, having tasted her cookery many times, clubbed together, and must have given at least a week's pay apiece to have turned out what they did for her. This was no less than a silver pot, well-designed, but suited, surely, rather to the bridegroom's taste than bride's. In a word, everybody gave her things.

And now my Lorna came to me, with a spring of tears in appealing eyes—for she was still somewhat childish, or rather, I should say, more childish now than when she lived in misery—and she placed her little hand in mine, and she was half afraid to speak, and dropped her eyes for me to ask.

"What is it, little darling?" I asked, as I saw her breath come fast, for the smallest emotion moved her form.

"You don't think, John, you don't think, dear, that you could lend me any money?"

"All I have got," I answered, "how much do you want, dear heart?"

"I have been calculating and I fear that I cannot do any good with less than ten pounds, John."

Here she looked up at me, with horror at the grandeur of the sum, and not knowing what I could think of it. But I kept my eyes from hers. "Ten pounds!" I said, in my deepest voice, on purpose to have it out in comfort, when she should be frightened: "what can you want with ten pounds, child?"

"That is my concern," said Lorna, plucking up her spirit at this; "when a lady asks for a loan, no gentlemen pries into the cause of her asking it."

"That may be as may be," I answered in a judicial manner: "ten pounds, or twenty, you shall have. But I must know the purport."

"Then that you never shall know, John. I am very sorry for asking you. It is not of the smallest consequence. Oh, dear, no." Herewith she was running away.

"Oh, dear, yes," I replied; "it is of very great consequence; and I understand the whole of it. You want to give that stupid Annie who has lost you a hundred thousand pounds, and who is going to be married before us—you want to give her a wedding present. And you shall do it, darling; because it is so good of you. Don't you know your title, love? How humble you are with us humble folk. You are Lady Lorna something, so far as I can make out yet; and you ought not even to speak to us. You will go away, and disdain us."

"If you please, talk not like that, John. I will have nothing to do with it, if it comes between you and me, John."

"You cannot help yourself," said I. And then she vowed that she could and would. And rank and birth were banished from between our lips in no time.

"What can I get her good enough? I am sure I do not know," she asked: "she has been so kind and good to me, and she is such a darling. How I shall miss her, to be sure! By-the-bye, you seem to think, John, that I shall be rich some day."

"Of course you will. As rich as the French king who keeps ours. Would the Lord Chancellor trouble himself about you, if you were poor?"

"Then if I am rich, perhaps you would lend me twenty pounds, dear John. Ten pounds would be very mean for a wealthy person to give her,"

To this I agreed, upon condition that I should make the purchase myself, whatever it might be. For nothing could be easier than to cheat Lorna about the cost, until time should come for her paying me. And this was better than to cheat her for the benefit of our family. For this end, and for many others, I set off to Dulverton, bearing more commissions, more messages, and more questions than a man of thrice my memory might carry so far as the corner where the sawpit is.

Uncle Reuben was not at home, but his granddaughter Ruth, who received me very kindly, was sure of his return in the afternoon, and persuaded me to wait for him. And by the time that I had finished all I could recollect of my orders, even with paper to help me, the old gentleman rode into the yard, and was more surprised than pleased to see me. But if he was surprised, I was more

than that—I was utterly astonished at the change in his appearance since the last time I had seen him. From a hale and rather heavy man, gray-haired, but plump and ruddy, he was altered to a shrunken, wizened, trembling, and almost decrepit figure. Instead of curly and comely locks, grizzled, indeed, but plentiful, he had only a few lank white hairs scattered and flattened upon his forehead. But the greatest change of all was in the expression of his eyes, which had been so keen and restless and bright, and a little sarcastic. Bright, indeed, they still were, but with a slow, unhealthy lustre; their keenness was turned to perpetual outlook, their restlessness to a haggard want. As for the humor which once gleamed there, it had been succeeded by stares of terror, and then mistrust, and shrinking. There was none of the interest in mankind which is needful even for satire.

"Now, what can this be?" thought I to myself: "has the old man lost all his property, or taken too much to strong waters?"

"Come inside, John Ridd," he said; "I will have a talk with you. It is cold out here, and it is too light. Come inside, John Ridd, boy."

I followed him into a little dark room. It was closed from the shop by an old division of boarding hung with tanned canvass, and the smell was very close and faint. Here there was a ledger-desk, and a couple of chairs, and a long-legged stool.

"Take the stool," said Uncle Reuben, showing me in very quietly; "it is fitter for your height, John.

"My boy, do you wish me to die?" he asked, coming up close to my stool, and regarding me with a shrewd, though blear-eyed gaze; "many do. Do you, John?"

"Come," said I, "don't ask such nonsense. You know better than that, Uncle Ben. I want you to live as long as possible, for the sake of—" Here I stopped.

"For the sake of what, John? I know it is not for my own sake. For the sake of what, my boy?"

"For the sake of Ruth," I answered; "if you must have all the truth. Who is to mind her when you are gone?"

"But if you knew that I had gold, or a manner of getting gold, far more than ever the sailors got out of the Spanish Galleons, far more than ever was heard of; and the secret was to be yours, John;

yours after me, and no other soul's—then you would wish me dead, John?" Here he eyed me as if a speck of dust in my eyes should not escape him.

"You are wrong, Uncle Ben; altogether wrong. For all the gold ever heard or dreamed of, not a wish would cross my heart to rob you of one day of life."

At last he moved his eyes from mine, but without any word, or sign to show whether he believed or disbelieved. Then he went to a chair and sat with his chin upon the ledger-desk, as if the effort of probing me had been too much for his weary brain. "Dreamed of! All the gold ever dreamed of! As if it were but a dream!" he muttered; and then he closed his eyes to think.

"Good Uncle Reuben," I said to him, "you have been a long way to-day, sir. Let me go and get you a glass of cordial. Cousin Ruth knows where to find it."

"How do you know how far I have been?" he asked, with a vicious look at me. "And Cousin Ruth! You are very pat with my granddaughter's name, young man!"

"It would be hard upon me, sir, not to know my own cousin's name."

"Very well. Let that go by. You have behaved very badly to Ruth. She loves you; and you love her not."

At this I was so wholly amazed that I could not say a single word; but looked, no doubt, very foolish.

"You may well be ashamed, young man," he cried, with some triumph over me; "you are the biggest of all fools, as well as a conceited coxcomb. What can you want more than Ruth? She is a little damsel, truly; but finer men than you, John Ridd, with all your boasted strength and wrestling, have wedded smaller maidens. And as for quality and value—bots! One inch of Ruth is worth all your six feet put together."

This was a little too much for me. Therefore, without a word, I went; only making a bow to him. And there was Ruth, as I took my horse with a trunk of frippery on him, poor little Ruth was at the bridle, and rusting all the knops of our town-going harness with tears.

"Good-bye, dear," I said, as she bent her head away from me; "shall I put you up on the saddle, dear?"

"Cousin Ridd, you may take it lightly," said Ruth, turning full upon me, "and very likely you are right, according to your nature"—this was the only cutting thing the little soul ever said to me—"but oh, Cousin Ridd, you have no idea of the pain you will leave behind you."

"How can that be so, Ruth?"

"In the first place, Cousin Ridd, grandfather will be angry with himself for having so ill-used you. And now he is so weak and poorly that he is always repenting. In the next place, I shall scold him first, until he admits his sorrow; and when he has admitted it, I shall scold myself for scolding him. And then he will come round again, and think that I was hard on him; and end perhaps by hating you—for he is like a woman now, John."

So the upshot was that the good horse went back to stable, and had another feed of corn; while my wrath sank within me.

Master Huckaback showed no especial signs of joy at my return; but received me with a little grunt, which appeared to me to mean, "Ah, I thought he would hardly be fool enough to go." I told him how sorry I was for having in some way offended him; and he answered that I did well to grieve for one, at least, of my offences.

He brought his chair very near mine, and sent Ruth away upon some errand which seemed of small importance.

"Come now, John," said Uncle Ben, laying his wrinkled hand on my knee, when he saw that none could heed us, "I know that you have a sneaking fondness for my grandchild Ruth. Don't interrupt me now; you have; and to deny it will only provoke me."

"I do like Ruth, sir," I said boldly, for fear of misunderstanding; "but I do not love her."

"Very well; that makes no difference. Liking may very soon be loving, when the maid has money to help her."

"But if there be, as there is in my case—"

"Once for all, John, not a word. I do not attempt to lead you into any engagement with little Ruth; neither will I blame you if no such engagement should ever be. But whether you will have my grandchild, or whether you will not—and such a chance is rarely offered to a fellow of your standing"—Uncle Ben despised all farmers—"in any case I have at last resolved to let you know my

secret; and for two good reasons. The first is that it wears me out to dwell upon it all alone, and the second is that I can trust you to fulfill a promise. Moreover, you are my next of kin, except among the womankind; and you are just the man I want to help me in my enterprise."

"And I will help you, sir," I answered, fearing some conspiracy, "in anything that is true and loyal, and according to the laws of the realm."

"Ha, ha!" cried the old man, laughing until his eyes ran over, and spreading out his skinny hands upon his shining breeches; "thou hast gone the same fools' track as the rest; even as spy Stickles went, and all his precious troopers. Landing of arms at Glenthorne and Lynmouth, wagons escorted across the moor, sounds of metal, and booming noises! Ah, but we managed it cleverly to cheat even those so near to us. Disaffection at Taunton, signs of insurrection at Dulverton, revolutionary tanner at Dunster! We set it all abroad, right well. And not even you to suspect our work; though we thought at one time that you watched us. Now who, do you suppose, is at the bottom of all this Exmoor insurgency, all this western rebellion—not that I say there is none, mind—but who is at the bottom of it"

"Either Mother Melldrum," said I, being now a little angry, "or else old Nick himself."

"Nay, old Uncle Reuben!" Saying this, Master Huckaback cast back his coat, and stood up, and made the most of himself.

"Well!" cried I, being now quite come to the limits of my intellect, "then, after all, Captain Stickles was right in calling you a rebel, sir!"

"Of course he was; could so keen a man be wrong about an old fool like me? But come and see our rebellion, John. I will trust you now with everything. I will take no oath from you, only your word to keep silence; and most of all from your mother."

"I will give you my word," I said, although liking not such pledges which make a man think before he speaks in ordinary company, against his usual practice. However, I was now so curious that I thought of nothing else, and scarcely could believe at all that Uncle Ben was quite right in his head.

"My son," he cried, with a cheerful countenance, which made him look more than ten years younger; "you shall come into part-

nership with me; your strength will save us two horses, and we always fear the horse-work. Come and see our rebellion, my boy; you are a made man from to-night."

"But where am I to come and see it? Where am I to find it, sir?"

"Meet me," he answered, yet closing his hands and wrinkling with doubt his forehead—"come alone, of course—and meet me at the Wizard's Slough, at ten to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER XXXVI

MASTER HUCKABACK'S SECRET

KNOWING Master Huckaback to be a man of his word, as well as one who would have others so, I was careful to be in good time the next morning by the side of the Wizard's Slough. I am free to admit that the name of the place bore a feeling of uneasiness. But I did my best not to think of this; only I thought it a wise precaution, and due for the sake of my mother and Lorna, to load my gun with a dozen slugs made from the lead of the old church-porch, laid by, long since, against witchcraft.

When I came to the foot of this ravine and over against the great black slough, there was no sign of Master Huckaback, nor of any other living man, except myself, in the silence. Therefore I sat in a niche of rock, gazing at the slough, until suddenly a man on horseback appeared as suddenly as if he had risen out of the earth, on the other side of the great black place. At first I was a little scared, my mind being in the tune for wonders, but presently the white hair, whiter from the blackness of the bog between us, showed me that it was Uncle Reuben come to look for me that way. Then I left my chair of rock and waved my hat and shouted to him, and the sound of my voice among the crags and lonely corners frightened me.

Old Master Huckaback made no answer, but beckoned me to come to him. There was just room between the fringe of reed and the belt of rock around it for a man going very carefully to escape that horrible pit-hole. And so I went round to the other side and there found open space enough, with stunted bushes, and starveling trees, and straggling tufts of rushes.

"You fool, you are frightened," said Uncle Ben, as he looked at my face after shaking hands; "I want a young man of steadfast courage, as well as of strength and silence. And after what I heard of the battle at Glen Doone, I thought I might trust you for courage."

"So you may," said I, "wherever I see mine enemy; but not where witch and wizard be."

"Tush, great fool!" cried Master Huckaback; "the only witch or wizard here is the one that bewitcheth all men. Now fasten up my horse, John Ridd, and not too near the slough, lad. Ah, we have chosen our entrance wisely. Two good horsemen and their horses, come hither to spy us out, are gone mining on their own account, and their last account it is, down this good wizard's bog-hole."

With these words, Uncle Reuben clutched the mane of his horse and came down, as a man does when his legs are old; and as I myself begin to do, at this time of writing. I offered a hand, but he was vexed, and would have nought to do with it.

"Now follow me, step for step," he said, when I had tethered his horse to a tree; "the ground is not death, but many parts are treacherous. I know it well by this time."

Without any more ado he led me in and out the marshy places to a great round hole or shaft, bretticed up with timber. I never had seen the like before, and wondered how they could want a well with so much water on every side. Around the mouth were a few little heaps of stuff unused to the daylight; and I thought at once of the tales I had heard concerning mines in Cornwall, and the silver cup at Combe-Martin, sent to the Queen Elizabeth.

"We had a tree across it, John," said Uncle Reuben, smiling grimly at my sudden shrink from it; "but some rogue came spying here, just as one of our men went up. He was frightened half out of his life, I believe, and never ventured to come again. But we put the blame of that upon you. And I see that we were wrong, John." Here he looked at me with keen eyes, though weak.

"You were altogether wrong," I answered. "Am I mean enough to spy upon any one dwelling with us? And more than that, Uncle Reuben, it was mean of you to suppose it."

"All ideas are different," replied the old man to my heat, like a little, worn-out rill running down a smithy: "you with your strength and youth, and all that, are inclined to be romantic. I take things as I have known them, going on for seventy years. Now, will you come and meet the wizard, or does your courage fail you?"

"My courage must be none," said I, "if I would not go where you go, sir."

He said no more, but signed to me to lift a heavy wooden corb with an iron loop across it, and sunk in a little pit of earth, a yard or so from the mouth of the shaft. I raised it, and by his direction dropped it into the throat of the shaft, where it hung and shook from a great cross-beam laid at the level of the earth. A very stout thick rope was fastened to the handle of the corb, and ran across a pulley hanging from the centre of the beam, and thence out of sight in the nether places.

"I will first descend," he said; "your weight is too great for safety. When the bucket comes up again, follow me, if your heart is good."

Then he whistled down, with a quick, sharp noise, and a whistle from below replied; and he clomb into the vehicle, and the rope ran through the pulley, and Uncle Ben went merrily down, and was out of sight before I had time to think of him.

Now being left on the bank like that, and in full sight of the goodly heaven, I wrestled hard with my flesh and blood about going down into the pit-hole. And but for the pale shame of the thing, that a white-headed man should adventure so, and green youth doubt about it, never could I have made up my mind, for I do love air and heaven. However, at last up came the bucket, and with a short, sad prayer I went into whatever might happen.

My teeth would chatter, do all I could; but the strength of my arms was with me; and by them I held on the grimy rope, and so eased the foot of the corb, which threatened to go away fathoms under me. Of course, I should still have been safe enough, being like an egg in an egg-cup, too big to care for the bottom; still I wished that all should be done in good order, without excitement.

The scoopings of the side grew black, and the patch of sky above more blue, as, with many thoughts of Lorna, a long way under ground I sank. Then I was fetched up at the bottom with a jerk and rattle; and but for holding by the rope so, must have tumbled over. Two great torches of bale-resin showed me all the darkness, one being held by Uncle Ben and the other by a short, square man, with a face which seemed well known to me.

"Hail to the world of gold, John Ridd," said Master Hucka-

back, smiling in the old dry manner: "bigger coward never came down the shaft,now did he, Carfax?"

"They be all alike," said the short, square man, "fust time as they doos it."

"May I go to heaven," I cried, "which is a thing quite out of sight"—for I always have a vein of humor, too small to be followed by any one—"if ever again of my own accord I go so far away from it!" Uncle Ben grinned less at this than at the way I knocked my shin in getting out of the bucket; and as for Master Carfax, he would not even deign to smile. And he seemed to look upon my entrance as an enterloping.

For my part, I had nought to do, after rubbing my bruised leg, except to look about me so far as the dulness of light would help. And herein I seemed like a mouse in a trap, able no more than to run to and fro, and knock himself, and stare at things. For here was a little channel grooved, with posts on either side of it, and ending with a heap of darkness, whence the sight came back again; and there was a scooped place, like a funnel, but pouring only to darkness. So I waited for somebody to speak first, not seeing my way to anything.

"You seem to be disappointed, John," said Uncle Reuben,looking blue by the light of the flambeaux; "did you expect to see the roof of gold, and the sides of gold, and the floor of gold, John Ridd?"

"Ha, ha!" cried Master Carfax: "I reckon he did; no doubt he did."

"You are wrong," I replied: "but I did expect to see something better than dirt and darkness."

"Come on then, my lad, and we will show you something better. We want your great arm here for a job that has beaten the whole of us."

With these words Uncle Ben led the way along a narrow passage roofed with rock and floored with slate-colored shale and shingle, and winding in and out, until we stopped at a great stone block or boulder, lying across the floor, and as large as my mother's best oaken wardrobe. Beside it were several sledge-hammers, battered, and some with broken helves.

"Thou great villian!" cried Uncle Ben, giving the boulder a

little kick; "I believe thy time is come at last. Now, John, give us a sample of the things they tell of thee. Take the biggest of them sledge-hammers and crack this rogue in two for us. We have tried at him for a fortnight, and he is a nut worth cracking. But we have no man who can swing that hammer, though all in the mine have handled it."

"I will do my very best," said I, pulling off my coat and waistcoat as if I were going to wrestle; "but I fear he will prove too tough for me."

"Ay, that he wull," grunted Master Carfax; "lack'th a Carnishman, and a beg one too, not a little charp such as I be. There be no man outside Carnwall as can crack that boolder."

"Bless my heart," I answered; "but I know something of you, my friend, or, at any rate, of your family. Well, I have beaten most of your Cornish men, though not my place to talk of it. But mind, if I crack this rock for you, I must have some of the gold inside it."

"Dost think to see the gold come tumbling out like the kernel of a nut, thou zany?" asked Uncle Reuben, pettishly: "now wilt thou crack it, or wilt thou not? For I believe thou canst do it, though only a lad of Somerset."

Uncle Reuben showed, by saying this, and by his glance at Carfax, that he was proud of his county, and would be disappointed for it if I failed to crack the boulder. So I begged him to stoop his torch a little that I might examine my subject. To me there appeared to be nothing at all remarkable about it, except that it sparkled here and there when the flash of the flame fell upon it. A great, obstinate, oblong, sullen stone; how could it be worth the breaking, except for making roads with?

Nevertheless I took up the hammer, and swinging it far behind my head, fetched it down with all my power upon the middle of the rock. The roof above rang mightily and the echo went down delven galleries, so that all the miners flocked to know what might be doing. But Master Carfax only smiled, although the blow shook him where he stood, for behold, the stone was still unbroken, and as firm as ever. Then I smote it again, with no better fortune, and Uncle Ben looked vexed and angry, but all the miners grinned with triumph.

"This little tool is too light," I cried; "one of you give me a piece of strong cord."

Then I took two more of the weightiest hammers and lashed them fast to the back of mine, not so as to strike, but to burden the fall. Having made this firm, and with room to grasp the handle of the largest one only I smiled at Uncle Ben, and whirled the mighty implement round my head, just to try whether I could manage it. Upon that the miners gave a cheer, being honest men, and desirous of seeing fair play between this stone and me with my hammer hammering.

Then I swung me on high to the swing of the sledge, as a thresher bends back to the rise of his flail, and with all my power descending delivered the ponderous onset. Crashing and crushed the great stone fell over, and threads of sparkling gold appeared in the jagged sides of the breakage.

"How now, Simon Carfax?" cried Uncle Ben, triumphantly; "wilt thou find a man in Cornwall can do the like of that?"

"Ay, and more," he answered: "however, it be pretty fair for a lad of these outlandish parts. Get your rollers, my lads, and lead it to the crushing engine."

I was glad to have been of service to them; for it seems that this great boulder had been too large to be drawn along the gallery and too hard to crack. But now they moved it very easily, taking piece by piece, and carefully picking up the fragments.

"Thou hast done us a good turn, my lad," said Uncle Reuben, as the others passed out of sight at the corner; "and now I will show thee the bottom of a very wondrous mystery. But we must not do it more than once, for the time of day is the wrong one."

The whole affair being a mystery to me, and far beyond my understanding, I followed him softly, without a word, yet thinking very heavily, and longing to be above ground again. He led me through small passages, to a hollow place near the descending-shaft where I saw a most extraordinary monster fitted up. In form it was like a great coffee-mill, such as I had seen in London, only a thousand times larger, and with a heavy windlass to work it.

"Put in a barrow-load of the smoulder," said Uncle Ben to Carfax; "and let them work the crank, for John to understand a thing or two."

"At this time of day!" cried Simon Carfax; "and the watching as has been o' late!"

However, he did it without more remonstrance; pouring into the scuttle at the top of the machine about a basketful of broken rock; and then a dozen men went to the wheel, and forced it round, as sailors do. Upon that such a hideous noise arose as I never should have believed any creature capable of making; and I ran to the well of the mine for air, and to ease my ears, if possible.

"Enough, enough!" shouted Uncle Ben, by the time I was nearly deafened; "we will digest our goodly boulder after the devil is come abroad for his evening work. Now, John, not a word about what you have learned; but henceforth you will not be frightened by the noise we make at dusk."

I could not deny but what this was very clever management. If they could not keep the echoes of the upper air from moving, the wisest plan was to open their valves during the discouragement of the falling evening; when folk would rather be driven away than drawn into the wilds and quagmires, by a sound so deep and awful, coming through the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXVII

LORNA GONE AWAY

ALTHOUGH there are very ancient tales of gold being found upon Exmoor in lumps and solid hummocks, and of men who slew one another for it, this deep digging and great labor seemed to me a dangerous and unholy enterprise. And Master Huckaback confessed that up to the present time his two partners and himself, for they proved to be three adventurers, had put into the earth more gold than they had taken out of it. Nevertheless he felt quite sure that it must in a very short time succeed, and pay them back an hundredfold; and he pressed me with great earnestness to join them, and work there as much as I could, without moving my mother's suspicions.

I asked him how they had managed so long to carry on without discovery; and he said that this was partly through the wildness of the neighborhood, partly through their own great caution, and manner of fetching both supplies and implements by night; but most of all, they had to thank the troubles of the period, the suspicions of rebellion, and the terror of the Doones, which kept folk from being too inquisitive where they had no business. The slough, moreover, had helped them well, both by making their access dark, and yet more by swallowing up and concealing all that was cast from the mouth of the pit.

Once, before the attack on Glen Doone, they had a narrow escape from the king's commissioner, for Captain Stickles went with half a dozen troopers, on purpose to search the neighborhood. Now if he had ridden alone, most likely he would have discovered everything; but he feared to venture so, having suspicion of a trap. Coming, as they did, in a company, all mounted and conspicuous, the watchman who was posted now on the top of the hill, could not help espying them, miles distant, over the moorland. He watched them under the shade of his hand, and presently ran down the hill, and raised a great commotion. Then Simon Carfax and all his men

came up, and made things natural, removing every sign of work; and finally, sinking underground, drew across the mouth of the pit a hurdle thatched with sedge and heather. Only Simon himself was left behind, ensconced in a hole of the crags, to observe the doings of the enemy.

Captain Stickles rode very bravely, with all his men clattering after him, down the rocky pass, and even to the margin of the slough. And there they stopped and held council, for it was a perilous thing to risk the passage upon horseback between the treacherous brink and the cliff, unless one knew it thoroughly. Stickles, however, and one follower carefully felt the way along, having their horses well in hand, and bearing a rope to draw them out, in case of being foundered. Then they spurred across the rough, boggy land, farther away than the shaft was.

Seeing no track of men, nor anything but marshwork, and stormwork, and of the seasons, these two honest men rode back and were glad to do so. For above them hung the mountains, cowled with fog, and seamed with storm, and around them desolation, and below their feet the grave.

Now I had enough of that underground work to last me for a year to come; neither would I, for sake of gold, have ever stepped into that bucket of my own good-will again. But when I told Lorna all about my great descent and the honeycombing of the earth, her chief desire was to know more about Simon Carfax.

"It must be our Gwenny's father," she cried; "the man who disappeared underground, and whom she has ever been seeking. How grieved the poor little thing will be, if it should turn out, after all, that he left his child on purpose! I can hardly believe it; can you, John?"

"Well," I replied, "all men are wicked, more or less, to some extent; and no man may say otherwise."

For I did not wish to commit myself to an opinion about Simon lest I might be wrong and Lorna think less of my judgment.

But being resolved to see this out, and do a good turn if I could to Gwenny, who had done me many a good one, I begged my Lorna to say not a word of this matter to the handmaiden, until I had further searched it out. And, to carry out this resolve, I

went again to the place of business where they were grinding gold as freely as an apothecary at his pills.

At the bottom Master Carfax met me, being captain of the mine, and desirous to know my business. He wore a loose sack round his shoulders, and his beard was two feet long.

"My business is to speak with you," I answered, rather sternly, for this man, who was nothing more than Uncle Reuben's servant, had carried things too far with me, showing no respect whatever; and, though I do not care for much, I liked to receive a little, even in my early days.

"Coom into the muck-hole, then," was his gracious answer; and he led me into a filthy cell where the miners changed their jackets.

"Simon Carfax," I began, with a manner to discourage him; "I fear you are a shallow fellow and not worth my trouble."

"Then don't take it," he replied; "I want no man's trouble."

"For your sake I would not," I answered; "but for your daughter's sake I will, the daughter whom you left to starve so pitifully in the wilderness."

The man stared at me with his pale gray eyes, whose color was lost from candle-light; and his voice as well as his body shook, while he cried:

"It is a lie, man! No daughter and no son have I. Nor was ever child of mine left to starve in the wilderness. You are too big for me to tackle, and that makes you a coward for saying it." His hands were playing with a pickaxe-helve as if he longed to have me under it.

"Perhaps I have wronged you, Simon," I answered very softly, for the sweat upon his forehead shone in the smoky torch-light, "if I have, I crave your pardon. But did you not bring up from Cornwall a little maid named 'Gwenny,' and supposed to be your daughter?"

"Ay, and she was my daughter, my last and only child of five; and for her I would give this mine, and all the gold will ever come from it."

"You shall have her, without either mine or gold, if you only prove to me that you did not abandon her."

"Abandon her! I abandon Gwenny!" he cried, with such a

rage of scorn that I at once believed him. "They told me she was dead and crushed, and buried in the drift here; and half my heart died with her!"

"The scoundrels must have lied to you," I answered, with a spirit fired by his heat of fury; "the maid is living, and with us. Come up, and you shall see her."

"Rig the bucket," he shouted out along the echoing gallery; and then he fell against the wall, and through the grimy sack I saw the heaving of his breast as I have seen my opponent's chest in a long, hard bout of wrestling. Without another word we rose to the level of the moors and mires; neither would Master Carfax speak as I led him across the barrows.

I put him in the cow-house, not to frighten the little maid; and he listened to my voice outside, and held on, and preserved himself. For now he would have scooped the earth to have his child restored to him. Then I went and fetched his Gwenny forth from the back kitchen where she was fighting, as usual, with our Betty.

"Come along, you little Vick," I said, for so we called her; "I have a message to you, Gwenny. Come and see who is in the cow-house."

Gwenny knew; she knew in a moment. Looking into my eyes, she knew; and hanging back from me to sigh, she knew it even better.

She had not much elegance of emotion, being flat and square all over, but none the less for that her heart came quick, and her words came slowly:

"Oh, Jan, you are too good to cheat me. Is it joke you are putting upon me?"

I answered her with a gaze alone, and she tucked up her clothes and followed me, because the road was dirty. Then I opened the door just wide enough for the child to go to her father, and left those two to have it out as might be most natural. And they took a long time about it.

When this poor man left his daughter, asleep as he supposed, and having his food and change of clothes and Sunday hat to see to, he meant to return in an hour or so and settle about her sustenance in some house of the neighborhood. But this was the very thing

of all things which the leaders of the enterprise, who had brought him up from Cornwall for his noted skill in metals, were determined, whether by fair means or foul, to stop at the very outset. Secrecy being their main object, what chance could there be of it if the miners were allowed to keep their children in the neighborhood? Hence, on the plea of feasting Simon, they kept him drunk for three days and three nights, assuring him that his daughter was as well as could be, and enjoying herself with the children. Not wishing the maid to see him tipsy, he pressed the matter no further, but applied himself to the bottle again, and drank her health with pleasure.

However, after three days of this his constitution rose against it, and he became quite sober, with a certain lowness of heart, moreover, and a sense of error. And his first desire to right himself, and easiest way to do it, was by finding Gwenny. Possessed with this intention, he sought for Gwenny high and low, first with threats, and then with fears, and then with tears and wailing. And so he became to the other men a warning and great annoyance. Therefore, they combined to swear what seemed a very likely thing, and might be true for all they knew, to wit, that Gwenny had come to seek for her father down a shaft-hole, and, peering too eagerly into the dark, had toppled forward, and gone down, and lain at the bottom as dead as a stone.

So, I needs must go and tell my Lorna all this story, and her joy was almost as great as if she, herself had found a father.

About this time a mighty giant had arisen in a part of Cornwall, and his calf was twenty-five inches round, and the breadth of his shoulders two feet and a quarter, and his stature seven feet and three quarters. Round the chest he was seventy inches, and his hand a foot across, and there were no scales strong enough to judge of his weight in the market-place. Now this man—or, I should say, his backers and his boasters, for the giant himself was modest—sent me a brave and haughty challenge to meet him in the ring at Bodmintown on the first day of August, or else to return my champion's belt to them by the messenger.

It is no use to deny but that I was greatly dashed and scared at first. For my part, I was only, when measured without clothes on, sixty inches round the breast, and round the calf scarce twenty-

one, only two feet across the shoulders, and in height not six and three quarters. However, my mother would never believe that this man could beat me; and Lorna being of the same mind, I resolved to go and try him, as they would pay all expenses, and a hundred pounds, if I conquered him, so confident were those Cornishmen.

Now this story is too well known for me to go through it again and again. Every child in Devonshire knows, and his grandson will know the song which some clever man made of it after I had treated him to water and to lemon and a little sugar and a drop of eau-de-vie. Enough that I had found the giant quite as big as they had described him, and enough to terrify any one. But trusting in my practice and study of the art, I resolved to try a back with him; and when my arms were around him once, the giant was but a farthingale put into the vice of a blacksmith. The man had no bones; his frame sank in, and I was afraid of crushing him. He lay on his back, and smiled at me, and I begged his pardon.

After that visit to Cornwall, and with my prize-money about me, I came on foot from Okehampton to Oare, so as to save a little sum towards my time of marrying. For Lorna's fortune I would not have; small or great, I would not have it.

Now coming into the kitchen with all my cash in my breeches pocket, golden guineas with an elephant on them for the stamp of the guinea company, I found dear mother most heartily glad to see me safe and sound again—for she had dreaded that giant, and dreamed of him—and she never asked me about the money. Lizzie also was softer and more gracious than usual, especially when she saw me pour guineas, like pepper-corns, into the pudding-basin. But, by the way they hung about, I knew that something was gone wrong.

"Where is Lorna?" I asked at length, after trying not to ask it; "I want her to come and see my money. She never saw so much before."

"Alas!" said mother, with a heavy sigh, "she will see a great deal more, I fear, and a deal more than is good for her. Whether you ever see her again will depend upon her nature, John."

"What do you mean, mother? Have you quarrelled? Why does not Lorna come to me? Am I never to know?"

"Now, John, be not so impatient," my mother replied, quite calmly, for in truth she was jealous of Lorna; "you could wait now very well, John, if it were till this day week, for the coming of your mother, John. And yet your mother is your best friend. Who can ever fill her place?"

"Now," said I, being wild by this time, "Lizzie, you have a little sense; will you tell me where is Lorna?"

"The Lady Lorna Dugal," said Lizzie, screwing up her lips, as if the title were too grand, "is gone to London, brother John, and not likely to come back again. We must try to get on without her."

"You little—" (something) I cried, which I dare not write down here, as all you are too good for such language; but Lizzie's lip provoked me so—"my Lorna gone, my Lorna gone! And without good-bye to me even! It is your spite has sickened her."

"You are quite mistaken there," she replied; "how can folk of low degree have either spite or liking towards the people so far above them? The Lady Lorna Dugal is gone because she could not help herself; and she wept enough to break ten hearts—if hearts are ever broken, John."

"Darling Lizzie, how good you are!" I cried, without noticing her sneer; "tell me all about it, dear; tell me every word she said."

"That will not take long," said Lizzie, "the lady spoke very little to any one, except, indeed, to mother and to Gwenny Carfax; and Gwenny is gone with her, so that the benefit of that is lost. But she left a letter for 'poor John,' as in charity she called him. How grand she looked, to be sure, with the fine clothes on that were come for her!"

"Where is the letter?"

Lizzie answered quitely: "The letter is in the little cupboard, near the head of Lady Lorna's bed, where she used to keep the diamond necklace which we contrived to get stolen."

Without another word I rushed up to my lost Lorna's room, and tore the little wall-niche open and espied my treasure. It was as simple and as homely and loving as even I could wish. Part of it ran as follows—the other parts it behooves me not to open out to strangers:

"My own love, and sometimes lord: Take it not amiss of me,

that, even without farewell, I go; for I cannot persuade the men to wait, your return being doubtful. My great-uncle, some grand lord, is awaiting me at Dunster, having fear of venturing too near this Exmoor country. I, who have been so lawless always, and the child of outlaws, am now to atone for this, it seems, by living in a court of law and under special surveillance of his majesty's Court of Chancery. My uncle is appointed my guardian and master; and I must live beneath his care until I am twenty-one years old. To me this appears a dreadful thing, and very unjust and cruel, for why should I lose my freedom through heritage of land and gold? I offered to abandon all if they would only let me go; I went down on my knees to them, and said I wanted titles not, neither land nor money, only to stay where I was where first I had known happiness. But they only laughed, and called me 'child,' and said I must talk of that to the king's high chancellor. Their orders they had, and must obey them; and Master Stickles was ordered, too, to help, as the king's commissioner. And then, although it pierced my heart not to say one 'good-bye, John,' I was glad upon the whole that you were not here to dispute it. For I am almost certain that you would not, without force to yourself, have let your Lorna go to people who never, never can care for her."

Here my darling had wept again, by the tokens on the paper; and then there followed some sweet words, too sweet for me to chatter them. But she finished with these noble lines, "Of one thing rest you well assured—and I do hope that it may prove of service to your rest, love, else would my own be broken—no difference of rank or fortune, or of life itself, shall ever make me swerve from truth to you. We have passed through many troubles, dangers, and dispartments, but never was doubt between us, neither ever shall be. Each has trusted well the other, and still each must do so. Though they tell you I am false, though your own mind harbors it, from the sense of things around and your own undervaluing, yet take counsel of your heart, and cast such thoughts away from you; being unworthy of itself, they must be unworthy also of the one who dwells there; and that one is, and ever shall be, your own Lorna Dugal."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THEREFORE HE SEEKS COMFORT

FINDING myself unable at last to bear Lorna's absence any longer, upon the first day when all the wheat was cut, and the stooks set up in every field, yet none quite fit for carrying, I saddled good Kickums at five in the morning, and off I set for Molland parish to have the counsel and comfort of my darling Annie. She made me welcome and helped me in my loneliness, so I started home again right soon.

I relied upon Kickums's strength to take me round by Dulverton. It would make the journey some eight miles longer, but what was that to a brisk young horse, even with my weight upon him? And having left Squire Faggus and Annie much sooner than had been intended, I had plenty of time before me, and too much, ere a prospect of dinner. Therefore I struck to the right, across the hills, for Dulverton.

Pretty Ruth was in the main street of the town with a basket in her hand, going home from market.

"Why, Cousin Ruth, you are grown," I exclaimed; "I do believe you are, Ruth. And you are almost too tall, already."

At this the little thing was so pleased that she smiled through her blushes beautifully, and must needs come to shake hands with me; though I signed to her not to do it, because of my horse's temper. But scarcely was her hand in mine, when Kickums turned like an eel upon her, and caught her by the left arm with his teeth, so that she screamed with agony. I saw the white of his vicious eye, and struck him there with all my force, with my left hand over her right arm, and he never used that eye again; none the less he kept his hold on her. Then I smote him again on the jaw, and caught the little maid up by her right hand, and laid her on the saddle in front of me; while the horse being giddy and staggered with blows, and foiled of his spite, ran backward. Ruth's wits were gone, and she lay before me in such a helpless and senseless way that I could

have killed vile Kickums. I struck the spurs into him and away he went at full gallop, while I had enough to do to hold on with the little girl lying in front of me. But I called to the men who were flocking around to send up a surgeon, as quick as could be, to Master Reuben Huckaback's.

The moment I brought my right arm to bear the vicious horse had no chance with me; and if ever a horse was well paid for spite, Kickums had his change that day. The bridle would almost have held a whale, and I drew on it so that his lower jaw was well-nigh broken from him; while with both spurs I tore his flanks, and he learned a little lesson. There are times when a man is more vicious than any horse may vie with. Therefore by the time we had reached Uncle Reuben's house at the top of the hill the bad horse was only too happy to stop; every string of his body was trembling, and his head hanging down with impotence. I leaped from his back at once, and carried the maiden into her own sweet room.

Now Cousin Ruth was recovering softly from her fright and faintness; and the volley of the wind, from galloping so, had made her little ears quite pink and shaken her locks all round her. But any one who might wish to see a comely sight and a moving one need only have looked at Ruth Huckaback, when she learned the manner of her little ride with me. Her hair was of a hazel-brown, and full of waving readiness; and with no concealment of the trick, she spread it over her eyes and face. Being so delighted with her, and so glad to see her safe, I kissed her through the thick of it, as a cousin has a right to do, yea, and ought to do, with gravity.

"Darling," I said: "he has bitten you dreadfully. Show me your poor arm, dear."

She pulled up her sleeve in the simplest manner, rather to look at it herself than to show me where the wound was. Her sleeve was of dark blue Taunton staple, and her white arm shone, coming out of it, as round and plump and velvety as a stalk of asparagus newly fetched out of ground. But above the curved soft elbow three sad gashes, edged with crimson, spoiled the flow of the pearly flesh. My presence of mind was lost altogether, and I raised the poor sore arm to my lips, both to stop the bleeding and to take the venom out, having heard how wise it was, and thinking of my

mother. But Ruth, to my great amazement, drew away from me in bitter haste, as if I had been inserting instead of extracting poison. For the bite of the horse is most venomous, especially when he sheds his teeth, and far more to be feared than the bite of a dog, or even of a cat. And in my haste, I had forgotten that Ruth might not know a word about this, and might doubt about my meaning, and the warmth of my osculation. But knowing her danger, I durst not heed her childishness, or her feelings.

"Don't be a fool, Cousin Ruth," I said, catching her so that she could not move; "the poison is soaking into you. Do you think that I do it for pleasure?"

The spread of shame on her face was such, when she saw her own misunderstanding, that I was ashamed to look at her, and occupied myself with drawing all the risk of glanders forth from the white limb, hanging helpless now, and left entirely to my will. Before I was quite sure of having wholly exhausted suction, in came the doctor, partly drunk, and in haste to get through his business.

"Ha, ha! I see," he cried; "bite of a horse, they tell me. Very poisonous; must be burned away. Sally, the iron in the fire—if you have a fire, this weather."

"Crave your pardon, good sir," I said, for poor little Ruth was fainting again at his savage orders: "but my cousin's arm shall not be burned; it is a great deal too pretty, and I have sucked all the poison out. Look, sir, how clean and fresh it is."

"Bless my heart! And so it is. No need at all for cauterizing. The epidermis will close over, and the cutis and the pellis. John Ridd, you ought to have studied medicine, with your healing powers. I leave you in excellent hands, my dear. Bread-and-water poultice cold, to be renewed in three hours."

When Master Huckaback came home he looked at me very sulkily; not only because of my refusal to become a slave to the gold-digging, but also because he regarded me as the cause of a savage broil between Simon Carfax and the men who had cheated him as to his Gwenny. However, when Uncle Ben saw Ruth, and knew what had befallen her, and she with tears in her eyes declared that she owed her life to Cousin Ridd, the old man became very gracious to me; for if he loved any one on earth, it was his little granddaughter.

I could not stay very long, because, my horse being quite unfit to travel from the injuries which his violence and vice had brought upon him, there was nothing for me but to go on foot, as none of Uncle Ben's horses could take me to Plover's Barrows without downright cruelty; and though there would be a harvest-moon, Ruth agreed with me that I must not keep my mother waiting, with no idea where I might be, until a late hour of the night. I told Ruth all about our Annie, making her laugh about Annie's new-fangled closet for clothes, or standing-press as she called it.

This press had frightened me so that I would not come without my stick to look at it; for the front was inlaid with two fiery dragons, and a glass which distorted everything, making even Annie look hideous; and when it was opened, a woman's skeleton, all in white, revealed itself, in the midst of three standing women. "It is only to keep my best frocks in shape," Annie had explained to me; "hanging them up does ruin them so. But I own that I was afraid of it, John, until I had got all my best clothes there, and then I became very fond of it. But even now it frightens me sometimes in the moonlight."

Having made poor Ruth a little cheerful with a full account of all Annie's frocks, material, pattern, and fashion, I proceeded to tell her about my own troubles, and the sudden departure of Lorna, concluding, with all the show of indifference which my pride could muster, that now I never should see her again and must do my best to forget her, as being so far above me. I had not intended to speak of this, but Ruth's face was so kind and earnest that I could not stop myself.

"You must no talk like that, Cousin Ridd," she said, in a slow and gentle tone, and turning away her eyes from me; "no lady can be above a man who is pure and brave and gentle. And if her heart be worth having, she will never let you give her up for her grandeur and her nobility."

Then I asked her full and straight, and looking at her in such a manner that she could not look away without appearing vanquished by feelings of her own—which thing was very vile of me—but all men are so selfish.

"Dear cousin, tell me, once for all, what is your advice to me."

"My advice to you," she answered bravely, with her dark eyes

full of pride, and instead of flinching, foiling me, "is to do what every man must do, if he would win fair maiden. Since she cannot send you token, neither is free to return to you, follow her, pay your court to her, show that you will not be forgotten, and perhaps she will look down—I mean, she will relent to you."

"She has nothing to relent about. I have never vexed nor injured her. My thoughts have never strayed from her. There is no one to compare with her."

"Then keep her in that same mind about you. See now, I can advise no more. My arm is swelling painfully, in spite of all your goodness and bitter task of surgeonship. I shall have another poultice on and go to bed, I think, Cousin Ridd, if you will not hold me ungrateful. I am so sorry for your long walk. Surely it might be avoided. Give my love to dear Lizzie; oh, the room is going round so!"

And she fainted into the arms of Sally, who was come just in time to fetch her; no doubt she had been suffering agony all the time she talked to me. Leaving word that I would come again to inquire for her, and fetch Kickums home, so soon as the harvest permitted me, I gave directions about the horse, and, striding away from the ancient town, was soon upon the moorlands.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE KING MUST NOT BE PRAYED FOR

ALL our neighborhood was surprised that the Doones had not ere now attacked and, probably, made an end of us. For we lay almost at their mercy now, having only Sergeant Bloxham and three men to protect us, Captain Stickles having been ordered southwards with all his force, except such as might be needful for collecting toll and watching the imports at Lynmouth and thence to Porlock. The sergeant, having now imbibed a taste for writing reports, reported weekly from Plover's Barrows, whenever he could find a messenger. And Lizzie wrote the greater part of his reports, and furnished up the rest to such a pitch of lustre that Lord Clarendon himself need scarce have been ashamed of them. Our mother while disapproving Lizzie's long stay in the saddle-room on a Friday night and a Saturday, and insisting that Betty should be there, was, nevertheless, as proud as need be that the king should read our Eliza's writing—at least, so the innocent soul believed—and we all looked forward to something great as the fruit of all this history. And something great did come of it, though not as we expected; for these reports, or as many of them as were ever opened, stood us in good stead the next year, when we were accused of harboring and comforting guilty rebels.

Now the reason why the Doones did not attack us was that they were preparing to meet another and more powerful assault upon their fortress; being assured that their repulse of king's troops could not be looked over when brought before the authorities. And no doubt they were right; for although the conflicts in the government during that summer and autumn had delayed the matter, yet positive orders had been issued that these outlaws and malefactors should at any price be brought to justice; when the sudden death of King Charles the Second threw all things into confusion, and all minds into a panic.

We heard of it first in church, on Sunday, the eighth of February, 1684-5, from a cousin of John Fry, who had ridden over on purpose from Porlock. He came in just before the anthem, splashed and heated from his ride, so that every one turned and looked at him. He wanted to create a stir and he took the best way to do it. For he let the anthem go by very quietly—or, rather, I should say very pleasingly, for our choir was exceedingproud of itself, and I sang bass twice as loud as a bull to beat the clerk with the clarionet. Then, just as Parson Bowden, with a look of pride at his minstrels, was kneeling down to begin the prayer for the king's most excellent majesty, up jumps young Sam Fry, and shouts— —

"I forbid that there prai-er."

"What!" cried the parson, rising slowly, and looking for some one to shut the door: "have we a rebel in the congregation?" For the parson was growing short-sighted now, and knew not Sam Fry at that distance.

"No," replied Sam, not a whit abashed by the staring of all the parish; "no rebel, parson; but a man who mislaiketh popery and murder. That there prai-er be a prai-er for the dead."

"Nay," cried the parson, now recognizing and knowing him to be our John's first cousin, "you do not mean to say, Sam, that his gracious majesty is dead!"

"Dead as a sto-un; poisoned by the Papishers." And Sam rubbed his hands with enjoyment at the effect he had produced.

"Remember where you are, Sam," said Parson Bowden solemnly, "when did this most sad thing happen? The king is the head of the church, Sam Fry; when did his majesty leave her?"

"Day afore yesterday. Twelve o'clock. Warn't us quick to hear of 'un?"

"Can't be," said the minister: "the tidings can never have come so soon. Anyhow, he will want it all the more. Let us pray for his gracious majesty."

Now when the service was over we killed the king and we brought him to life at least fifty times in the churchyard; and Sam Fry was mounted on a high gravestone to tell every one all he knew of it. But he knew no more than he had told us in the church, as before repeated; upon which we were much disappointed with him, and inclined to disbelieve him; until he happily remem-

bered that his majesty had died in great pain, with blue spots on his breast and black spots all across his back, and these in the form of a cross by reason of Papists having poisoned him. When Sam called this to his remembrance, or to his imagination, he was overwhelmed at once with so many invitations to dinner that he scarce knew which of them to accept, but decided in our favor.

Grieving much for the loss of the king, however greatly it might be for the royal benefit, I resolved to ride to Porlock myself directly after dinner, and make sure whether he were dead or not. For it was not by any means hard to suppose that Sam Fry, being John's first cousin, might have inherited either from grandfather or grandmother some of those gifts which had made our John so famous for mendacity. At Porlock I found that it was too true; and the women of the town were in great distress, for the king had always been popular with them; the men, on the other hand, were forecasting what would be likely to ensue.

And I myself was of this number, riding sadly home again, although bound to the king as church warden now, which dignity, next to the parson's in rank, is with us hereditary.

But though appointed at last, by virtue of being best farmer in the parish, yet, while I dwelt with pride upon the fact that I stood in the king's shoes, as the manager and promoter of the Church of England, and I knew that we must miss his majesty as the leader of our thoughts in church, and handsome upon a guinea; nevertheless I kept on thinking how his death would act on me.

And here I saw it many ways. In the first place, troubles must break out; and we had eight-and-twenty ricks, counting grain and straw and hay. Moreover, mother was growing weak about riots and shooting and burning, and she gathered the bed-clothes around her ears every night when her feet were tucked up, and prayed not to awake until morning. And the terror of the Doones helped greatly, as a fruitful tree of lawlessness and a good excuse for everybody. And after this—or, rather, before it and first of all—arose upon me the thought of Lorna, and how these things would affect her fate.

I must admit that it had occurred to me sometimes, or been suggested by others, that the Lady Lorna had not behaved altogether kindly, since her departure from among us. For although

in those days the post did not extend to our part of the world, yet it might have been possible to procure for hire a man who would ride post, if Lorna feared to trust the pack-horses or the trooper who went to and fro. Yet no message whatever had reached us, neither any token even of her safety in London. As to this last, however, we had no misgivings, having learned from the orderlies, more than once, that the wealth and beauty and adventures of young Lady Lorna Dugal were greatly talked of, both at court and among the common people.

Now riding sadly homewards in the sunset of the early spring, I was more than ever touched with sorrow and a sense of being, as it were, abandoned. And the weather growing quite beautiful, and so mild that the trees were budding, and the cattle full of happiness, I could not but think of the difference between the world of to-day and the world of this day twelvemonth. Then all was howling desolation, all the earth blocked up with snow, and all the air with barbs of ice as small as splintered needles, yet glittering in and out, like stars, and gathering so upon a man, if long he stayed among them, that they began to weigh him down to sleepiness and frozen death. Not a sign of life was moving, nor was any change of view, unless the wild wind struck the crest of some cold drift, and bowed it.

Now, on the other hand, all was good. The open palm of spring was laid upon the yielding of the hills, and each particular valley seemed to be the glove for a finger. And although the sun was low and dipping in the western clouds, the gray light of the sea came up and took, and taking, told the special tone of everything. All this lay upon my heart without a word of thinking, spreading light and shadow there, and the soft delight of sadness. Nevertheless, I would it were the savage snow around me, and the piping of the restless winds, and the death of everything. For in those days I had Lorna.

Then I thought of promise fair, such as glowed around me, where the red rocks held the sun when he was departed, and the distant crags endeavored to retain his memory. But as evening spread across them, shading with the silent fold, all the color stole away; all remembrance waned and died.

"So has it been with love," I thought, "and with simple truth

and warmth. The maid has chosen the glittering stars instead of the plain daylight."

Nevertheless, I would not give in, and I tried to see things right and then judge aright about them. This, however, was more easy to attempt than to achieve, and by the time I came down the hill I was none the wiser. Only I could tell my mother that the king was dead for sure, and she would have tried to cry but for thought of her mourning.

There was not a moment for lamenting. All the mourning must be ready in eight-and-forty hours; and although it was Sunday night, mother, now feeling sure of the thing, sat up with Lizzie, cutting patterns, and stitching things on brown paper, and snipping, and laying the fashions down, and requesting opinions.

Almost before we had put off the mourning, which as loyal subjects we kept for the king three months and a week, rumors of disturbances, of plottings, and of outbreak began to stir among us. We heard of fighting in Scotland, and buying of ships on the Continent, and of arms in Dorset and Somerset; and we kept our beacon in readiness to give signals of a landing, or, rather, the soldiers did. For we, having trustworthy reports that the king had been to high mass himself in the Abbey of Westminster, making all the bishops go with him, and all the guards in London, and then tortured all the Protestants who dared to wait outside, moreover, had received from the Pope a flower grown in theVirgin Mary's garden, and warranted to last forever. We of the moderate party, hearing all this and ten times as much, and having no love for this sour James, such as we had for the lively Charles, were ready to wait for what might happen, rather than care about stopping it.

Therefore we listened to rumors gladly, and shook our heads with gravity, and predicted every man something, but scarce any two the same. Nevertheless, in our part, things went on as usual until the middle of June was nigh. We ploughed the ground and sowed the corn and tended the cattle, and heeded every one his neighbor's business as carefully as heretofore; and the only thing that moved us much was that Annie had a baby. This being a very fine child with blue eyes, and christened "John" in compliment to me, and with me for his godfather, it is natural to suppose that I

thought a good deal about him; and when mother or Lizzie would ask me, all of a sudden and treacherously, when the fire flared up at supper-time, for we always kept a little wood just alight in summer-time, and enough to make the pot boil, then when they would say to me, "John, what are you thinking of? At a word, speak!" I would always answer, "Little John Faggus;" and so they made no more of me.

But when I was down on Saturday, the thirteenth of June, at the blacksmith's forge by Brendon town, where the Lynn stream runs so close that he dips his horse-shoes in it, and where the news is apt to come first of all our neighborhood, while we were talking of the hay-crop and of a great sheep-stealer, round the corner came a man upon a piebald horse looking fagged and weary. But seeing a half dozen of us, young and brisk and hearty, he made a flourish with his horse, and waved a blue flag vehemently, shouting with great glory:

"Monmouth and the Protestant faith! Monmouth and no Popery! Monmouth, the good king's eldest son! Down with the poisoning murderer! Down with the black usurper, and to the devil with all Papists!"

"Why so, thou little varlet?" I asked, very quietly; for the man was too small to quarrel with; yet knowing Lorna to be "Papist," as we choose to call them—though they might as well call us "Kingists," after the head of our church—I thought that this scurvy, scampish knave might show them the way to the place he mentioned, unless his courage failed him.

"Papist yourself, be you?" said the fellow, not daring to answer much; "then take this and read it."

And he handed me a long rigmarole, which he called a "Declaration;" I saw that it was but a heap of lies, and thrust it into the blacksmith's fire, and blew the bellows thrice at it. No one dared attempt to stop me, for my mood had not been sweet of late; and of course they knew my strength.

The man rode on with a muttering noise, having won no recruits from us by force of my example; and he stopped at the alehouse farther down, where the road goes away from the Lynn stream. Some of us went thither after a time, when our horses were shodden and rasped, for although we might not like the man we

might be glad of his tidings, which seemed to be something wonderful. He had set up his blue flag in the tap-room, and was teaching every one.

"Here coom'th Maister Jan Ridd," said the landlady, being well pleased with the call for beer and cider; "he hath been to Lunnon town, and live within a maile of me. Arl the news coom from them nowadays, instead of from here, as he ought to do. If Jan Ridd say it be true, I will try a'most to belave it. Hath the good Duke landed, sir?" And she looked at me over a foaming cup, and blew the froth off, and put more in.

"I have no doubt it is true enough," I answered before drinking; "and too true, Mistress Pugsley. Many a poor man will die; but none shall die from our parish, nor from Brendon, if I can help it."

And I knew that I could help it; for every one in those little places would abide by my advice, not only from the fame of my schooling and long sojourn in London, but also because I had earned repute for being very "slow and sure;" and with nine people out of ten this is the very best recommendation.

For the next fortnight we were daily troubled with conflicting rumors, each man relating what he desired rather than what he had right to believe. We were told that the duke had been proclaimed King of England in every town of Dorset and of Somerset; that he had won a great battle at Axminster, and another at Bridport, and another somewhere else; that all the western counties had risen as one man for him, and all the militia joined his ranks; that Taunton and Bridgewater and Bristowe were all mad with delight, the two former being in his hands, and the latter craving to be so. And then, on the other hand, we heard that the duke had been vanquished and put to flight, and upon being apprehended had confessed himself an imposter and a Papist as bad as the king was.

We longed for Colonel Stickles, as he always became in time of war, though he fell back to captain and even lieutenant directly the fight was over, for then we should have won trusty news, as well as good consideration. But even Sergeant Bloxham, much against his will, was gone, having left his heart with our Lizzie, and a collection of all his writings. All the soldiers had been or-

dered away at full speed for Exeter to join the Duke of Albemarle, or, if he were gone, to follow him. As for us, who had fed them so long, we must take our chance of Doones or any other enemies.

Now all these tidings moved me a little; not enough to spoil appetite, but enough to make things lively, and to teach me that look of wisdom which is bred of practice only and the hearing of many lies. Therefore I withheld my judgment, fearing to be triumphed over if it should happen to miss the mark. But mother and Lizzie, ten times in a day, predicted all they could imagine; and their prophecies increased in strength according to contradiction. Yet this was not in the proper style for a house like ours, which knew the news, or, at least, had known it, and still was famous all around for the last advices. Even from Lynmouth people sent up to Plover's Barrows to ask how things were going on; and it was very grievous to answer that in truth we knew not, neither had heard for days and days; and our reputation was so great, especially since the death of the king had gone abroad from Oare parish, that many inquirers would only wink, and lay finger on the lip, as if to say, "you know well enough, but see not fit to tell me." And before the end arrived, those people believed that they had been right all along, and that we had concealed the truth from them.

For I myself became involved, much against my will and my proper judgment, in the troubles and the conflict and the cruel work coming afterwards.

One day, at the beginning of July, I came home from mowing about noon, or a little later, to fetch some cider for all of us and to eat a morsel of bacon. For mowing was no joke that year, the summer being wonderfully wet, even for our wet country, and the swath falling heavier over the scythe than ever I could remember it.

In the courtyard I saw a little cart with iron breaks underneath it, such as fastidious people use to deaden the jolting of the road; but few men under a lord or baronet would be so particular. Therefore I wondered who our noble visitor could be. But when I entered the kitchen-place, brushing up my hair for somebody, behold, it was no one greater than our Annie, with my godson in her arms, and looking pale and tear-begone. And at first she could not speak to me. But presently, having sat down a little, and received

much praise for her baby, she smiled and blushed, and found her tongue as if she had never gone from us.

"How natural it all looks again! Oh, I love this old kitchen so! Baby dear, only look at it wid him pitty, pitty eyes, and him tongue out of his mousy! But who put the flour-riddle up there? And look at the pestle and mortar, and rust, I declare, in the patty-pans! And a book, positively a dirty book, where the clean skewers ought to hang! Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie, Lizzie!"

"You may just as well cease lamenting," I said, "for you can't alter Lizzie's nature, and you will only make mother uncomfortable and perhaps have a quarrel with Lizzie, who is proud as Punch of her housekeeping."

"She!" cried Annie, with all the contempt that could be compressed in a syllable. "Well, John, no doubt you are right about it. I will try not to notice things. But it is a hard thing, after all my care, to see everything going to ruin. Will they cook our dinner for us? John, I am in such trouble."

"Don't you cry, my dear; don't cry, my darling sister," I answered, as she dropped into the warm place of the settle, and bent above her baby, rocking as if both their hearts were one; "don't you know, Annie, I cannot tell, but I know, or at least I mean, I have heard the men of experience say, it is so bad for the baby."

"Perhaps I know that as well as you do, John," said Annie, looking up at me, with a gleam of her old laughing; "but how can I help crying? I am in such trouble."

"Tell me what it is, my dear. Any grief of yours will vex me greatly, but I will try to bear it."

"Then, John, it is just this. Tom has gone off with the rebels; and you must, oh, you must go after him."

CHAPTER XL

JOHN IS WORSTED BY THE WOMEN

MOVED as I was by Annie's tears and gentle style of coaxing, and, most of all, by my love for her, I yet declared that I could not go and leave our house and homestead, far less my dear mother and Lizzie, at the mercy of the merciless Doones.

"Is that all your objection, John?" asked Annie, in her quick, panting way; "would you go but for that, John?"

"Now," I said, "be in no such hurry"—for while I was gradually yielding, I liked to pass it through my fingers, as if my fingers shaped it—"there are many things to be thought about, and many ways of viewing it."

"Oh, you never can have loved Lorna! No wonder you gave her up so! John, you can love nobody but your oat-ricks and your hay-ricks."

"Sister mine, because I rant not, neither rave of what I feel, can you be so shallow as to dream that I feel nothing? What is your love for Tom Faggus? What is your love for your baby to compare with such a love as forever dwells with me? Because I do not prate of it, because it is beyond me, not only to express but even form to my own heart in thoughts, because I do not shape my face, and would scorn to play to it as a thing of acting and lay it out before you, are you fools enough to think"—but here I stopped, having said more than was usual with me.

"I am very sorry, John. Dear John, I am so sorry. What a shallow fool I am!"

"I will go seek your husband," I said, to change the subject, for even to Annie I would not lay open all my heart about Lorna; "but only upon condition that you insure this house and people from the Doones meanwhile. Even for the sake of Tom, I cannot leave all helpless. The oat-ricks and the hay-ricks, which are my only love, they are welcome to make cinders of. But I will not have

mother treated so, nor even little Lizzie, although you scorn your sister so."

"Oh, John, I do think you are the hardest, as well as the softest, of all the men I know. Not even a woman's bitter word but what you pay her out for. Will you never understand that we are not like you, John? We say all sorts of spiteful things without a bit of meaning. John, fetch Tom home; then revile me as you please, and I will kneel and thank you."

"I will not promise to fetch him home," I answered, being ashamed of myself for having lost command so; "but I will promise to do my best, if we can only hit on a plan for leaving mother harmless."

Annie thought for a little while, trying to gather her smooth clear brow into maternal wrinkles, and then she looked at her child, and said, "I will risk it for daddy's sake, darling; you precious soul, for daddy's sake." I asked her what she was going to risk. She would not tell me, but took the upper hand, and saw to my cider-cans and bacon, and went from corner to cupboard exactly as if she had never been married, only without an apron on. And then she said, "Now to your mowers, John; and make the most of this fine afternoon. Kiss your godson before you go." And I, being used to obey her in little things of that sort, kissed the baby and took my cans and went back to my scythe again.

By the time I came home it was dark night and pouring again with a foggy rain, such as we have in July, even more than in January. Being soaked all through and through, and with water quelching in my boots like a pump with a bad bucket, I was only too glad to find Annie's bright face and quick figure flitting in and out the firelight, instead of Lizzie sitting grandly with a feast of literature and not a drop of gravy. Mother was in the corner also, with her cherry-colored ribbons glistening very nicely by candle-light, looking at Annie now and then with memories of her babyhood, and then at her having a baby; yet half afraid of praising her much for fear of that young Lizzie. But Lizzie showed no jealousy; she truly loved our Annie, now that she was gone from us, and she wanted to know all sorts of things, and she adored the baby. Therefore Annie was allowed to attend to me as she used to do.

"Now, John, you must start the first thing in the morning,"

she said, when the others had left the room, but somehow she stuck to the baby, "to fetch me back my rebel according to your promise."

"Not so," I replied, misliking the job, "all I promised was to go if this house were assured against any onslaught of the Doones."

"Just so; and here is that assurance." With these words she drew forth a paper and laid it on my knee with triumph, enjoying my amazement. This, as you may suppose, was great, not only at the document, but also at her possession of it. For, in truth, it was no less than a formal undertaking on the part of the Doones not to attack Plover's Barrows farm, or molest any of the inmates, or carry off any chattels during the absence of John Ridd upon a special errand. This document was signed not only by the Counsellor, but by many other Doones. Whether Carver's name were there I could not say for certain, as, of course, he would not sign it under his name of "Carver," and I had never heard Lorna say to what, if any, he had been baptized.

In the face of such a deed as this I could no longer refuse to go; and having received my promise, Annie told me how she had procured that paper. It was both a clever and courageous act, and would have seemed to me, at first sight, far beyond Annie's power. But none may gauge a woman's power when her love and faith are moved.

The first thing Annie had done was this: she made herself look ugly. This was not an easy thing, but she had learned a great deal from her husband upon the subject of disguises. It hurt her feelings not a little to make so sad a fright of herself, but what would it matter? If she lost Tom, she must be a far greater fright in earnest than now she was in seeming. And then she left her child asleep, under Betty Muxworthy's tendance—for Betty took to that child as if there never had been a child before—and away she went in her own "spring-cart" without a word to any one, except the old man who had driven her from Molland parish that morning, and who coolly took one of our best horses without "by your leave" to any one.

Annie made the old man drive her within easy reach of the Doone-gate, whose position she knew well enough from all our talk about it. And there she bade the old man stay until she should

return to him. Then, with her comely figure hidden by a dirty old woman's cloak, and her fair young face defaced by patches and by liniments, so that none might covet her, she addressed the young men at the gate in a cracked and trembling voice; and they were scarcely civil to the "old hag," as they called her. She said that she bore important tidings for Sir Counsellor himself and must be conducted to him. To him accordingly she was led, without even any hoodwinking, for she had spectacles over her eyes and made believe not to see ten yards.

She found Sir Counsellor at home, and when the rest were out of sight threw off all disguise to him, flashing forth as a lovely young woman from all her wraps and disfigurement. She flung her patches on the floor amid the old man's laughter, and let her tucked-up hair come down; and then went up and kissed him.

"Worthy and reverent Counsellor, I have a favor to ask," she began.

"So I should think from your proceedings," the old man interrupted; "ah, if I were half my age—"

"If you were, I would not sue so. But, most excellent Counsellor, you owe me some amends, you know, for the way in which you robbed me."

"Beyond a doubt I do, my dear. You have put it rather strongly, and it might offend some people. Nevertheless I own my debt, having so fair a creditor."

"And do you remember how you slept, and how much we made of you, and would have seen you home, sir, only you did not wish it?"

"And for excellent reasons, child. My best escort was in my cloak, after we made the cream to rise. Ha, ha! The unholy spell. My pretty child, has it injured you?"

"Yes, I fear it has," said Annie; "or whence can all my ill luck come?" And here she showed some signs of crying, knowing that Counsellor hated it.

"You shall not have ill luck, my dear. I have heard all about your marriage to a very noble highwayman. Ah, you made a mistake in that; you were worthy of a Doone, my child."

"My husband can appreciate," she answered, very proudly; "but what I wish to know is this, will you try to help me?"

The Counsellor answered that he would do so, if her needs were moderate; whereupon she opened her meaning to him, and told of all her anxieties. Considering that Lorna was gone, and her necklace in his possession, and that I would be out of the way all the while, the old man readily undertook that our house should not be assaulted, nor our property molested until my return. And to the promptitude of his pledge two things perhaps contributed, namely, that he knew not how we were stripped of all defenders, and that some of his own forces were away in the rebel camp.

For, as I learned thereafter, the Doones being now in direct feud with the present government and sure to be crushed if that prevailed, had resolved to drop all religious questions, and cast in their lot with Monmouth. And the turbulent youths, being long restrained from their wonted outlet for vehemence by the troopers in the neighborhood, were only too glad to rush forth upon any promise of blows and excitement.

However, Annie knew little of this, but took the Counsellor's pledge as a mark of special favor in her behalf and thanked him for it most heartily, and felt that he had earned the necklace; while he, like an ancient gentleman, disclaimed all obligation, and sent her under an escort safe to her own cart again. But Annie, repassing the sentinels, with her youth restored, and blooming with the flush of triumph went up to them very gravely, and said, "The old hag wishes you good evening, gentlemen;" and so made her best courtesy.

Now, look at it as I would, there was no excuse left for me, after the promise given. Dear Annie had not only cheated the Doones, but also had gotten the best of me, by a pledge to a thing impossible. And I bitterly said, "I am not like Lorna; a pledge once given, I keep it."

"I will not have a word against Lorna," cried Annie; "I will answer for her truth as surely as I would for my own or yours, John." And with that she vanquished me.

Right early in the morning I was off. I took good Kickums, who was worth ten sweet-tempered horses to a man who knew how to manage him; and being well charged both with bacon and powder, forth I set on my wild-goose chase.

We went away in merry style; my horse being ready for any-

thing, and I only too glad of a bit of change after months of working and brooding. Yet there was one thing rather unfavorable to my present enterprise; namely, that I knew nothing of the country I was bound to, nor even in what part of it my business might be supposed to lie. For besides the uncertainty caused by the conflict of reports, it was likely that King Monmouth's army would be moving from place to place according to the prospect of supplies and of reinforcements.

However, there would arise more chance of getting news as I went on, and my road being towards the east and south, Dulverton would not lie so very far aside of it but what it might be worth a visit, both to collect the latest tidings and to consult the maps and plans in Uncle Reuben's parlor. Therefore I drew the off-hand rein at the cross-road on the hills and made for the town, expecting, perhaps, to have breakfast with Master Huckaback, and Ruth to help and encourage us.

This little maiden was now become a very great favorite with me, having long outgrown, no doubt, her childish fancies and follies, such as my mother and Annie had planted under her soft brown hair. It had been my duty, as well as my true interest, for Uncle Ben was more and more testy as he went on gold-digging, to ride thither, now and again, to inquire what the doctor thought of her. Not that her wounds were long in healing, but that people can scarcely be too careful and too inquisitive, after a great horse-bite.

Now Ruth looked very grave indeed upon hearing of my enterprise, and said she could almost cry, for the sake of my dear mother. Did I know the risks and chances, not of the battle-field alone, but of the havoc afterwards; the swearing away of innocent lives, and the hurdle, and the hanging? And if I would please not to laugh, had I never heard of imprisonments, and torturing with the cruel boot, and selling into slavery where the sun and the lash outvied one another in cutting a man to pieces? I replied that of all these things I had heard, and would take especial care to steer me free of all of them. My duty was all that I wished to do, and none could harm me for doing that. And I begged my cousin to give me good-speed, instead of talking dolefully. Upon this she changed her manner wholly, becoming so lively and cheerful that

I was convinced of her indifference, and surprised even more than gratified.

"Go and earn your spurs, Cousin Ridd," she said; "you are strong enough for anything. Which side is to have the benefit of your doughty arms?"

"Have I not told you, Ruth," I answered, not being fond of this kind of talk, more suitable for Lizzie, "that I do not mean to join either side, that is to say, until—"

"Until, as the common proverb goes, you know which way the cat will jump. Oh, John Ridd! Oh, John Ridd!"

"Nothing of the sort," said I : "what a hurry you are in! I am for the king, of course."

"But not enough to fight for him. Only enough to vote, I suppose, or drink his health, or shout for him."

"I can't make you out to-day, Cousin Ruth; you are nearly as bad as Lizzie. You do not say any bitter things, but you seem to mean them."

"No, cousin, think not so of me. It is far more likely that I say them, without meaning them."

"Anyhow, it is not like you. And I know not what I can have done, in any way, to vex you."

"Dear me, nothing, Cousin Ridd; you never do anything to vex me."

"Then I hope I shall do something now, Ruth, when I say good-bye. God knows if we ever shall meet again, Ruth; but I hope we may."

"To be sure we shall," she answered in her brightest manner. "Try not to look wretched, John: you are as happy as a may-pole."

"And you as a rose in May," I said; "and pretty nearly as pretty. Give my love to Uncle Ben; and I trust him to keep on the winning side."

"Of that you need have no misgiving. Never yet has he failed of it. Now, Cousin Ridd, why go you not? You hurried me so at breakfast-time."

"My only reason for waiting, Ruth, is that you have not kissed me, as you are almost bound to do, for the last time, perhaps, of seeing me."

"Oh, if that is all, just fetch the stool, and I will do my best, cousin."

"I pray you be not so vexatious; you always used to do it nicely without any stool, Ruth."

"Ah, but you are grown since then, and become a famous man, John Ridd, and a member of the nobility. Go your way, and win your spurs. I want no lip-service."

Being at the end of my wits, I did even as she ordered me. At least, I had no spurs to win, because there were big ones on my boots, paid for in the Easter bill and made by a famous saddler so as never to clog with marsh-weed, but prick as hard as any horse, in reason, could desire. And Kickums never wanted spurs, but always went tail-foremost, if anybody offered them for his consideration.

CHAPTER XLI

SLAUGHTER IN THE MARSHES

WE rattled away at a merry pace out of the town of Dulverton, my horse being gayly fed, and myself quite fit again for going. Of course I was puzzled about Cousin Ruth, for her behavior was not at all such as I had expected; and, indeed, I had hoped for a far more loving and moving farewell than I got from her. But I said to myself, "It is useless ever to count upon what a woman will do; and I think that I must have vexed her almost as much as she vexed me. And now to see what comes of it." So I put my horse across the moorland; and he threw his chest out bravely.

But the manner in which I was bandied about by false information from pillar to post, or at other times driven quite out of my way by the presence of the king's soldiers, may be known by the names of the following towns, to which I was sent in succession, Bath, Frome, Wells, Wincanton, Glastonbury, Shepton, Bradford, Axbridge, Somerton, and Bridgewater.

This last place I reached one Sunday night, the fourth or fifth of July, I think—or it might be the sixth, for that matter, inasmuch as I had been too much worried to get the day of the month at church. Only I know that my horse and myself were glad to come to a decent place where meat and corn could be had for money; and being quite weary of wandering about, we hoped to rest there a little.

Of this, however, we found no chance, for the town was full of the good duke's soldiers, if men may be called so, the half of whom had never been drilled, nor had fired a gun. And it was rumored among them that the "popish army," as they called it, was to be attacked that very night, and beaten. However, by this time I had been taught to pay little attention to rumors; and having sought vainly for Tom Faggus among these poor rustic warriors, I took to my hostel and went to bed, being as weary as weary can be.

Falling asleep immediately, I took heed of nothing; although the town was all alive, and lights had come glancing as I lay down, and shouts making echo all round my room. But all I did was to bolt the door; not an inch would I budge, unless the house, and even my bed, were on fire. And so for several hours I lay in the depth of the deepest slumber, without even a dream on its surface, until I was roused and awakened at last by a pushing, and pulling, and pinching, and a plucking of hair out by the roots. And at length, being able to open mine eyes, I saw the old landlady, with a candle, heavily wondering at me.

"Can't you let me alone?" I grumbled: "I have paid for my bed, mistress, and I won't get up for any one."

"Young man," she answered, shaking me as hard as ever, "would that the popish soldiers may sleep, this night, only half as strong as thou dost! Fie on thee, fie on thee! Get up, and go fight; we can hear the battle already; and a man of thy size mought stop a cannon."

"I would rather stop a-bed," said I; "what have I to do with fighting? I am for King James, if any."

"Then thou mayest even stop a-bed," the old woman muttered sulkily. "I would never have labored half an hour to awake a Papisher. But hearken you one thing, young man; Zummerzett thou art, by thy brogue, or at least by thy understanding of it. No Zummerzett maid will look at thee, in spite of thy size and stature, unless thou strikest a blow this night."

"I lack no Zummerzett maid, mistress: I have a fairer than your brown things; and for her alone would I strike a blow."

At this the old woman gave me up, as being beyond correction; and it vexed me a little that my great fame had not reached so far as Bridgewater, when I thought that it went to Bristowe. But those people in East Somerset know nothing about wrestling. Devon is the headquarters of the art, and Devon is the county of my chief love.

I was by this time wide awake, though much aggrieved at feeling so, and through the open window heard the distant roll of musketry, and the beating of drums, with a quick rub-a-dub, and the "come round the corner" of trumpet-call. And perhaps Tom Faggus might be there, and shot at any moment, and my dear Annie left

a poor widow, and my godson Jack an orphan without a tooth to help him.

Therefore I reviled myself for all my heavy laziness; and partly through good honest will, and partly through the stings of pride, and yet a little perhaps by virtue of a young man's love of riot, up I arose and dressed myself and woke Kickums, who was snoring, and set out to see the worst of it. The sleepy hostler scratched his poll and could not tell me which way to take. What odds to him who was king or pope, so long as he paid his way, and got a bit of bacon on Sunday? I gave him double fee, as became a good farmer; and he was glad to be quit of Kickums, as I saw by the turn of his eyes while going out at the archway.

All this was done by lantern light, although the moon was high and bold; and in the northern heaven were flags and ribbons of a jostling pattern, such as we often have in autumn, but in July very rarely. Therefore I was guided mainly by the sound of guns and trumpets in riding out of the narrow ways and into the open marshes. And thus I might have found my road, in spite of all the spread of water, and the glaze of moonshine, but that, as I followed sound, fog met me. Now fog is a thing that I understand and can do with well enough where I know the country, but here I had never been before.

To a wild duck, born and bred there, it would almost be a puzzle to find her own nest among us; what chance then had I and Kickums, both unused to marsh and mere? Each time when we thought that we must be right at last by track or passage and approaching the conflict, with the sounds of it waxing nearer, suddenly a break of water would be laid before us, with the moon looking mildly over it, and the Northern Lights behind us dancing down the lines of fog.

It was an awful thing to hear the sounds of raging fight, and the yells of raving slayers, and the howls of poor men stricken hard, and shattered from wrath to wailing; then suddenly the dead low hush, as of a soul departing, and spirits kneeling over it. Through the vapor of the earth, and white breath of the water, and beneath the pale round moon all this rush and pause of fear passed or lingered on my path.

At last, when I almost despaired of escaping from this tangle

of spongy banks, and of hazy creeks, and reed-fringe, my horse heard the neigh of a fellow-horse, and was only too glad to answer it; upon which the other, having lost his rider, came up and pricked his ears at us, and gazed through the fog very steadfastly. Therefore I encouraged him with a soft and genial whistle, and Kickums did his best to tempt him with a snort of inquiry. However, nothing would suit that nag except to enjoy his new freedom, and he capered away with his tail set on high, and the stirrup-irons clashing under him. Therefore, as he might know the way, and appeared to have been in the battle, we followed him very carefully; and he led us to a little hamlet called, as I found afterwards, West Zuyland, or Zealand, so named, perhaps, from its situation amid this inland sea.

Here the king's troops had been quite lately and their fires were still burning, but the men themselves had been summoned away by the night attack of the rebels. I procured for my guide a young man who knew the district thoroughly, and who led me by many intricate ways to the rear of the rebel army. We came upon a broad open moor striped with sullen watercourses, shagged with sedge and yellow iris, and in the drier part with bilberries. By this time it was four o'clock, and the summer sun, arising wanly, showed us all the ghastly scene.

Would that I had never been there! Often in the lonely hours, even now, it haunts me: would, far more, that the piteous thing had never been done in England! Fleeing men, flung back from dreams of victory and honor, only glad to have the luck of life and limbs to fly with, mud-bedraggled, foul with slime, reeking both with sweat and blood which they could not stop to wipe, cursing with their pumped-out lungs every stick that hindered them, or gory puddle that slipped the step, scarcely able to leap over the men that had dragged to die.

And to see how the corpses lay; some, as fair in death as in sleep, with the smile of placid valor and of noble manhood hovering yet on the silent lips. These had bloodless hands put upwards, white as wax and firm as death, clasped in prayer for dear ones left behind, or in high thanksgiving. And of these men there was nothing in their broad blue eyes to fear. But others were of different sort, simple fellows unused to pain, accustomed to the bill-

hook, perhaps, or rasp of the knuckles in a quickset hedge, or making some-to-do at breakfast over a thumb cut in sharpening a scythe, and expecting their wives to make more to-do. Yet here lay these poor chaps, dead; dead, after a deal of pain.

Seeing me riding to the front, the fugitives called out to me, in half a dozen dialects to make no utter fool of myself, for the great guns were come, and the fight was over; all the rest was slaughter.

"Arl oop wi Moonmo'," shouted one big fellow, a miner of the Mendip hills whose weapon was a pickaxe: "na oose to vaight na more. Wend thee hame, yoong mon, agin."

Upon this I stopped my horse, desiring not to be shot for nothing, and eager to aid some poor sick people who tried to lift their arms to me. And this I did to the best of my power, though void of skill in the business, and more inclined to weep with them than to check their weeping. While I was giving a drop of cordial from my flask to one poor fellow, I felt warm lips laid against my cheek quite softly, and then a little push; and behold, it was a horse leaning over me!

I arose in haste and there stood Winnie, looking at me with beseeching eyes, enough to melt a heart of stone. Then, seeing my attention fixed, she turned her head and glanced back sadly towards the place of battle, and gave a little wistful neigh, and then looked me full in the face again as much as to say, "Do you understand?" while she scraped with one hoof impatiently. If ever a horse tried hard to speak, it was Winnie at that moment. I went to her side and patted her, but that was not what she wanted. Then I offered to leap into the empty saddle; but neither did that seem good to her, for she ran away towards the part of the field at which she had been glancing back, and then turned round and shook her mane, entreating me to follow her.

I mounted my own horse and, to Winnie's great delight, professed myself at her service. With her ringing silvery neigh, such as no other horse of all I ever knew could equal, she at once proclaimed her triumph, and told her master, or meant to tell, if death should not have closed his ears, that she was coming to his aid, and bringing one who might be trusted.

A cannon-bullet, fired low and ploughing the marsh slowly,

met poor Winnie front to front; and she being as quick as thought, lowered her nose to sniff at it. It might be a message from her master, for it made a mournful noise. But luckily for Winnie's life, a rise of wet ground took the ball, even under her very nose; and there it cut a splashy groove, missing her off hind-foot by an inch, and scattering black mud over her. It frightened me much more than Winnie, of that I am quite certain.

Nearly all were scattered now. Of the noble countrymen, armed with scythe or pickaxe, blacksmith's hammer, or fold-pitcher, who had stood their ground for hours against blazing musketry, from men whom they could not get at, by reason of the water-dyke, and then against the deadly cannon dragged by the bishop's horses to slaughter his own sheep: of these sturdy Englishmen, noble in their want of sense, scarce one out of four remained for the cowards to shoot down.

Then the cavalry of the king, with their horses at full speed, dashed from either side upon the helpless mob of countrymen. A few pikes, feebly levelled, met them; but they shot the pike-men, drew swords, and helter-skelter leaped into the shattered and scattering mass. Right and left they hacked and hewed; I could hear the snapping of scythes beneath them, and see the flash of their sweeping swords. How it must end was plain enough, even to one like myself, who had never beheld such a battle before. But Winnie led me away to the left; and as I could not help the people, neither stop the slaughter, but found the cannon-bullets coming very rudely nigh me, I was only too glad to follow her.

CHAPTER XLII

FALLING AMONG LAMBS

THAT faithful creature, whom I began to admire as if she were my own, stopped in front of a low black shed such as we call a "lin-hay." And here she uttered a little greeting, in a subdued and softened voice, hoping to obtain an answer such as her master was wont to give in a cheery manner. Receiving no reply, she entered; and I, who could scarce keep up with her, poor Kickums being weary, leaped from his back and followed. There I found her sniffing gently, but with great emotion, at the body of Tom Faggus. A corpse poor Tom appeared to be, if ever there was one in this world; and I turned away, and felt unable to keep altogether from weeping. But the mare either could not understand, or else would not believe it. She reached her long neck forth and felt him with her under lip, passing it over his skin as softly as a mother would do to an infant; and then she looked up at me again, as much as to say, "he is all right."

Upon this I took courage and handled poor Tom, which, being young, I had feared at first to do. He groaned very feebly as I raised him up, and there was the wound, a great savage one, gaping and welling in his right side from which a piece seemed to be torn away. I bound it up with some of my linen so far as I knew how, just to stanch the flow of blood until we could get a doctor. Then I gave him a little weak brandy and water, which he drank with the greatest eagerness and made sign to me for more of it.

After that he seemed better, and a little color came into his cheeks; and he looked at Winnie and knew her, and would have her nose in his clammy hand, though I thought it not good for either of them. With the stay of my arm he sat upright, and faintly looked about him, as if at the end of a violent dream too much for his power of mind. Then he managed to whisper, "Is Winnie hurt?"

"As sound as a roach," I answered. "Then so am I," said he; "put me upon her back, John; she and I die together."

Surprised as I was at this fatalism of which he had often

shown symptoms before, I knew not what to do; for it seemed to me a murderous thing to set such a man on horseback, where he must surely bleed to death even if he could keep the saddle. But he told me, with many breaks and pauses, that unless I obeyed his orders he would tear off all my bandages, and accept no further aid from me.

While I was yet hesitating, a storm of horses at full gallop went by, tearing, swearing, bearing away all the country before them. Only a little pollard hedge kept us from their bloodshot eyes. "Now is the time," said my Cousin Tom, so far as I could make out his words; "on their heels I am safe, John, if I only have Winnie under me. Winnie and I die together."

Seeing this strong bent of his mind, stronger than any pains of death, I even did what his feeble eyes sometimes implored and sometimes commanded. With a strong scarf from his own hot neck, bound and twisted tight as wax around his damaged waist, I set him upon Winnie's back, and placed his trembling feet in the stirrups with a band from one to other under the good mare's body, so that no swerve could throw him out; and then I said, "Lean forward, Tom; it will stop your hurt from bleeding."

He leaned almost on the neck of the mare, which, as I knew, must close the wound; and the light of his eyes was quite different, and the pain of his forehead unstrung itself, as he felt the undulous readiness of her volatile paces under him.

"God bless you, John; I am safe," he whispered, fearing to open his lungs much: "who can come near my Winnie mare? A mile of her gallop is ten years of life. Look out for yourself, John Ridd." He sucked his lips, and the mare went off as easy and swift as a swallow.

"Well," thought I, as I looked at Kickum ignobly cropping a bit of grass, "I have done a very good thing, no doubt, and ought to be thankful for the chance. But as for getting away unharmed, with all these scoundrels about me, and only a foundered horse to trust in—good and spiteful as he is—upon the whole, I begin to think that I have made a fool of myself according to my habit. No wonder Tom said, 'Look out for yourself!' I shall look out from a prison window, or perhaps even out of a halter; and then, what will Lorna think of me?"

Being in this wistful mood, I resolved to abide awhile, even where fate had thrown me, for my horse required good rest no doubt, and was taking it even while he cropped, with his hind-legs stretched out and his fore-legs gathered under him and his muzzle on the mole-hills, so that he had five supportings from his mother earth. Hence I resolved, upon the whole, though grieving about breakfast, to light a pipe and go to sleep, or at least until the hot sun should arouse the flies.

I may have slept three hours, or four, or it might be even five—for I never counted time while sleeping—when a shaking, more rude than the old landlady's, brought me back to the world again. I looked up with a mighty yawn, and saw twenty or so of foot-soldiers.

"This linhay is not yours," I said, when they had quite aroused me, with tongue and hand and even sword-prick; "what business have you here, good fellows?"

"Business bad for you," said one, "and will lead you to the gallows."

"Do you wish to know the way out again?" I asked, very quietly, as being no braggadocio.

"We will show thee the way out," said one chap, and thereupon they all fell wagging like a bed of clover leaves in the morning.

"Will you pile your arms outside," I said, "and try a bit of fair play with me?"

For I disliked these men sincerely and was fain to teach them a lesson; they were so unchristian in appearance, having faces of a coffee color, and dirty beards half over them. Moreover, their dress was outrageous and their address still worse. However, I had wiser let them alone as will appear afterwards. These savage-looking fellows laughed at the idea of my having any chance against some twenty of them; but I knew that the place was in my favor, for my part of it had been fenced off so that only two could come at me at once, and I must be very much out of training if I could not manage two of them. Therefore I laid aside my carbine and the two horse-pistols; and they, with many coarse jokes at me, went a little way outside and set their weapons against the wall, and turned up their coat-sleeves jauntily, and then began to hesitate.

"Go you first, Bob," I heard them say; "you are the biggest man of us; and Dick the Wrestler along of you. Us will back you up, boy."

"I'll warrant I'll draw the badger," said Bob; "and not a tooth will I leave him." Then he and another man made a rush, and the others came double-quick march on their heels. But as Bob ran at me most stupidly, not even knowing how to place his hands, I caught him with my knuckles at the back of his neck, and with all the sway of my right arm sent him over the heads of his comrades. Meanwhile Dick the Wrestler had grappled me, expecting to show off his art, of which, indeed, he had some small knowledge, but, being quite of the light-weights, in a second he was flying after his companion, Bob.

Now these two men were hurt so badly, the light one having knocked his head against the lintel of the outer gate, that the rest had no desire to encounter the like misfortune. So they hung back, whispering, and before they had made up their minds I rushed into the midst of them. The suddenness and the weight of my onset took them wholly by surprise; and for once in their lives, perhaps, Kirke's Lambs, for so they were called, were worthy of their name. Like a flock of sheep at a dog's attack they fell away, hustling one another, and my only difficulty was not to tumble over them.

I had taken my carbine out with me, having a fondness for it; but the two horse pistols I left behind, and therefore felt good title to take two from the magazine of the Lambs. And with these and my carbine I leaped upon Kickums, who was now quite glad of a gallop again; and bade adieu to that mongrel lot; yet they had the meanness to shoot at me.

And now my way was home again. Nobody could say but what I had done my duty and rescued Tom from the mischief into which his own perverseness and love of change had led or seemed likely to lead him. And how proud would my mother be; and—ah, well, there was nobody else to be proud of me now.

But while thinking these things, and desiring my breakfast beyond any power of describing, and even beyond my remembrance, I fell into another fold of Lambs, from which there was no escape. These, like true crusaders, met me, swaggering very heartily, and

with their barrels of cider set, like so many cannon, across the road, over against a small hostel.

"We have won the victory, my lord king, and we mean to enjoy it. Down from thy horse and have a stoop of cider, thou big rebel."

"No rebel am I. My name is John Ridd. I belong to the side of the king, and I want some breakfast."

These fellows were truly hospitable, that much I will say for them. Being accustomed to Arab ways, they could toss a grill, or fritter, or an egg into any form they pleased, comely and very good to eat; and it led me to think of Annie. So I made the rarest breakfast any man might hope for after all his troubles and got on with these brown fellows better than could be expected. I was beginning to understand a little of what they told me, when up came those confounded Lambs who had shown more tail than head to me in the linhay, as I mentioned.

Now these men upset everything. My partners at breakfast swore that I was no prisoner, but the best and most loyal subject and the finest-hearted fellow they had ever the luck to meet with. Whereas the men from the linhay swore that I was a rebel miscreant; and have me they would, with a rope's-end ready.

While this fight was going on it was in my power at any moment to take horse and go. And this would have been my wisest plan, and a very great saving of money; but somehow I felt as if it would be a mean thing to slip off so. Even while I was hesitating, and the men were breaking each other's heads, a superior officer rode up with his sword drawn and his face on fire.

"What, my Lambs, my Lambs!" he cried, smiting with the flat of his sword; "is this how you waste my time and my purse when you ought to be catching a hundred prisoners worth ten pounds apiece to me? Who is this young fellow we have here? Speak up, sirrah; what art thou, and how much will thy good mother pay for thee?"

"My mother will pay nought for me," I answered, while the Lambs fell back and glowered at one another. "So please your worship, I am no rebel, but an honest farmer, well proved of loyalty."

"Ha, ha; a farmer, art thou? Those fellows always pay the

best. Good farmer, come to yon barren tree; thou shalt make it fruitful."

Colonel Kirke made a sign to his men, and, before I could think of resistance, stout new ropes were flung around me and with three men on either side I was led along very painfully. And now I saw, and repented deeply of my careless folly in stopping with those boon-companions, instead of being far away.

I beheld myself in a grievous case, and likely to get the worst of it. For the face of the colonel was hard and stern as a block of bogwood oak; and though the men might pity me and think me unjustly executed, yet they must obey orders or themselves be put to death. Therefore I addressed myself to the colonel in a most ingratiating manner, begging him not to sully the glory of his victory, and dwelling upon my pure innocence and even good service to our lord the king. But Colonel Kirke only gave command that I should be smitten in the mouth which office Bob, whom I flung so hard out of the linhay, performed with great zeal and efficiency. But, being aware of the coming smack, I thrust forth a pair of teeth, upon which the knuckles of my good friend made a melancholy shipwreck.

It is not in my power to tell half the thoughts that moved me when we came to the fatal tree and saw two men hanging there already, as innocent, perhaps, as I was, and henceforth entirely harmless. Though ordered by the colonel to look steadfastly upon them, I could not bear to do so; upon which he called me a paltry coward, and promised my breeches to any man who would spit upon my countenance. This vile thing Bob, being angered, perhaps, by the smarting wound of his knuckles, bravely stepped forward to do for me, trusting, no doubt, to the rope I was led with. But, unluckily, as it proved for him, my right arm was free for a moment, and therewith I dealt him such a blow that he never spake again.

At the sound and sight of that bitter stroke, the other men drew back, and Colonel Kirke, now black in the face with fury and vexation, gave orders for to shoot me and cast me into the ditch hard by. The men raised their pieces and pointed at me, waiting for the word to fire; and I, being quite overcome by the hurry of these events, and quite unprepared to die yet, could only think all

upside down about Lorna and my mother and wonder what each would say to it. I spread my hands before my eyes, not being so brave as some men and hoping, in some foolish way, to cover my heart with my elbows. I heard the breath of all around, as if my skull were a sounding-board; and knew even how the different men were fingering their triggers. And a cold sweat broke all over me as the colonel, prolonging his enjoyment, began slowly to say "Fire."

But while he was dwelling on the "F," the hoofs of a horse dashed out on the road, and horse and horseman flung themselves betwixt me and the gun muzzles. So narrowly was I saved that one man could not check his trigger: his musket went off, and the ball struck the horse on the withers, and scared him exceedingly. He began to lash out with his heels all around, and the colonel was glad to keep clear of him; and the men made excuse to lower their guns, not really wishing to shoot me.

"How now, Captain Stickles?" cried Kirke, the more angry because he had shown his cowardice; "dare you, sir, to come betwixt me and my lawful prisoner?"

"Nay, hearken one moment, colonel," replied my old friend Jeremy, and his damaged voice was the sweetest sound I had heard for many a day; "for your own sake hearken." He looked so full of momentous tidings that Colonel Kirke made a sign to his men not to shoot me till further orders; and then he went aside with Stickles, so that, in spite of all my anxiety, I could not catch what passed between them. But I fancied that the name of the Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys was spoken more than once, and with emphasis and deference.

"Then I leave him in your hands, Captain Stickles," said Kirke at last, so that all might hear him; and though the news was so good for me, the smile of baffled malice made his dark face look most hideous; "and I shall hold you answerable for the custody of this prisoner."

"Colonel Kirke, I will answer for him," Master Stickles replied, with a grave bow and one hand on his breast. "John Ridd, you are my prisoner. Follow me, John Ridd."

Upon that, those precious Lambs flocked away, leaving the rope still around me; and some were glad and some were sorry

not to see me swinging. Being free of my arms again, I touched my hat to Colonel Kirke, as became his rank and experience; but he did not condescend to return my short salutation, having espied in the distance a prisoner out of whom he might make money.

I wrung the hand of Jeremy Stickles for his truth and goodness; and he almost wept as he answered, "Turn for turn, John. You saved my life from the Doones, and I have saved you from far worse company."

CHAPTER XLIII

SUITABLE DEVOTION

NOW Kickums was not like Winnie, and so he had not followed my fortunes except at his own distance. No doubt but what he felt a certain interest in me, but his interest was not devotion and man might go his way and be hanged, rather than horse would meet hardship. Therefore, seeing things to be bad, and his master involved in trouble, what did this horse do but start for the ease and comfort of Plover's Barrows and the plentiful ration of oats abiding in his own manger. For this I do not blame him.

But I could not help being very uneasy at the thought of my mother's discomfort and worry when she should spy this good horse coming home without any master or rider, and I almost hoped that he might be caught by some of the king's troopers, rather than find his way home and spread distress among our people. Yet, knowing his nature, I doubted if any could catch, or, catching, would keep him.

Jeremy Stickles assured me, as we took the road to Bridgwater, that the only chance for my life was to obtain an order forthwith for my despatch to London as a suspected person, but not found in open rebellion and believed to be under the patronage of the great Lord Jeffreys. "For," said he, "in a few hours' time you would fall into the hands of Lord Feversham, who has won this fight without seeing it, and who has returned to bed again to have his breakfast more comfortably. Now he may not be quite so savage, perhaps, as Colonel Kirke, nor find so much sport in gibbeting, but he is equally pitiless, and his price, no doubt, would be higher."

"I will pay no price whatever," I answered, "neither will I fly. An hour agone I would have .fled for the sake of my mother and the farm. But now that I have been taken prisoner and my name is known, if I fly the farm is forfeited, and my mother and sister

must starve. Moreover, I have done no harm; I have borne no weapons against the king, nor desired the success of his enemies. If they have aught to try me for, I will stand my trial."

"Then to London thou must go, my son. There is no such thing as trial here; we hang the good folk without it, which saves them much anxiety. But quicken thy step, good John; I have influence with Lord Churchill and we must contrive to see him ere the foreigner falls to work again. Lord Churchill is a man of sense and imprisons nothing but his money."

We were lucky enough to find this nobleman, who has since become so famous by his foreign victories. He received us with great civility, and looked at me with much interest, being a tall and fine young man himself, but not to compare with me in size although far better favored. I liked his face well enough, but thought there was something false about it. He put me a few keen questions, such as a man not assured of honesty might have found hard to answer; and he stood in a very upright attitude, making the most of his figure.

I saw nothing to be proud of, at the moment, in this interview, but since the great Duke of Marlborough rose to the top of glory, I have tried to remember more about him than my conscience quite backs up. How should I know that this man would be foremost of our kingdom in five-and-twenty years or so; and, not knowing, why should I heed him, except for my own pocket? Nevertheless, I have been so cross-questioned—far worse than by young Lord Churchill—about his grace the Duke of Marlborough, and what he said to me, and what I said then, and how his grace replied to that, and whether he smiled like another man, or screwed up his lips like a button, as our parish tailor said of him, and whether I knew from the turn of his nose that no Frenchman could stand before him; all these inquiries have worried me so ever since the battle of Blenheim that if tailors would only print upon waistcoats, I would give double price for a vest bearing this inscription: "No information can be given about the Duke of Marlborough."

Now this good Lord Churchill, for one might call him good by comparison with the very bad people around him, granted, without any long hesitation, the order for my safe deliverance to the Court of King's Bench at Westminster; and Stickles, who had to

report in London, was empowered to convey me and was made answerable for producing me. This arrangement would have been entirely to my liking if my mother could be warned that nothing was amiss with me, only a mild and, as one might say, nominal captivity. And to prevent her anxiety I did my best to send a letter through good Sergeant Bloxham, of whom I heard as quartered with Dumbarton's regiment at Chedzuy. But that regiment was away in pursuit, and I was forced to entrust my letter to a man who said that he knew him, and accepted a shilling to see to it.

For fear of any unpleasant change we set forth at once for London. The sight of it warmed my heart. But what moved me most, when I saw again the noble oil and tallow of the London lights and the dripping torches at almost every corner and the handsome signboards, was the thought that here my Lorna lived and walked and took the air, and perhaps, thought now and then of the old days in the good farmhouse. Although I would make no approach to her, any more than she had done to me, yet there must be some chance of falling in with the maiden somehow, and learning how her mind was set.

I lodged with my old furrier, the which was a thoroughly hearty man and welcomed me to my room again, with two shillings added to the rent in the joy of his heart at seeing me. Being under parole to Master Stickles, I only went out betwixt certain hours, because I was accounted as liable to be called upon, for what purpose I knew not, but hoped it might be a good one. I felt it a loss and a hindrance to me that I was so bound to remain at home during the session of the courts of law, for thereby the chance of ever beholding Lorna was very greatly contracted, if not altogether annihilated. For these were the very hours in which the people of fashion and the high world were wont to appear to the rest of mankind, so as to encourage them. And, of course, by this time, the Lady Lorna was high among people of fashion, and was not likely to be seen out of fashionable hours.

Nevertheless I heard of Lorna from my worthy furrier almost every day, and with a fine exaggeration. This honest man was one of those who, in virtue of their trade and nicety of behavior, are admitted into noble life to take measurements and show patterns. And while so doing, they contrive to acquire what is to the English

mind at once the most important and most interesting of all knowledge, the science of being able to talk about the titled people. So my furrier, whose name was Ramsack, having to make robes for peers and cloaks for their wives, knew the great folk, sham or real, as well as he knew a fox or skunk from a wolverine skin.

And when I hinted about Lady Lorna Dugal, the old man's face became so pleasant that I knew her birth must be wondrous high. At this my own countenance fell, I suppose, for the better she was born, the harder she would be to marry—and, mistaking my object, he took me up.

"Perhaps you think, Master Ridd, that because her ladyship, Lady Lorna Dugal, is of Scottish origin, therefore her birth is not as high as of our English nobility. If you think so, you are wrong, sir. She comes not of the sandy Scotch race, with high cheek-bones and raw shoulder-blades, who set up pillars in their court-yards. But she comes of the very best Scotch blood, descended from the Norsemen. Her mother was of the very noblest race, the lords of Lorne, higher even than the great Argyle, who has lately made a sad mistake and paid for it most sadly. And her father was descended from the King Dugal, who fought against Alexander the Great. No, no, Master Ridd; none of your promiscuous blood, such as runs in the veins of half our modern peerage."

From Master Ramsack I discovered that the nobleman, to whose charge Lady Lorna had been committed by the Court of Chancery, was Earl Brandir of Lock Awe, her poor mother's uncle. For the Countess of Dugal was daughter and only child of the last Lord Lorne, whose sister had married Sir Ensor Doone; while he himself had married the sister of Earl Brandir. This nobleman had a country house near the village of Kensington and here his niece dwelt with him, when she was not in attendance on her majesty the queen, who had taken a liking to her. Now, since the king had begun to attend the celebration of mass in the chapel at Whitehall —and not at Westminster Abbey, as our gossips had averred—he had given order that the doors should be thrown open so that all who could make interest to get into the ante-chamber might see this form of worship. Master Ramsack told me that Lorna was there almost very Sunday, their majesties being most anxious to have the presence of all the nobility of the Catholic persuasion so

as to make a goodly show. And the worthy furrier, having influence with the doorkeepers, kindly obtained admittance for me one Sunday into the ante-chamber.

Here I took care to be waiting before the royal procession entered; but being unknown, and of no high rank, I was not allowed to stand forward among the better people, but ordered back into a corner very dark and dismal, the verger remarking, with a grin, that I could see over all other heads and must not set my own so high. Being frightened to find myself among so many people of great rank and gorgeous apparel, I blushed at the notice drawn upon me by this uncourteous fellow and silently fell back into the corner by the hangings.

You may suppose that my heart beat high when the king and queen appeared and entered, followed by the Duke of Norfolk, bearing the sword of state, and by several other noblemen and people of repute. Then the doors of the chapel were thrown wide open, and though I could only see a little, being in the corner so, I thought that it was beautiful. Bowers of rich silk were there, and plenty of metal shining, and polished wood with lovely carving, flowers too of the noblest kind, and candles made by somebody who had learned how to clarify tallow. This last thing amazed me more than all, for our dips never will come clear, melt the mutton fat how you will. And methought that this hanging of flowers about was a very pretty thing, for if a man can worship God best of all beneath a tree, as the natural instinct is, surely when by fault of climate the tree would be too apt to drip, the very best make-believe is to have enough and to spare of flowers which to the dwellers in London seem to have grown on the tree denied them.

Be that as it may, when the king and queen crossed the threshold, a mighty flourish of trumpets arose, and a waving of banners. The Knights of the Garter were to attend that day in state and some went in, and some stayed out, and it made me think of the difference betwixt the ewes and the wethers. For the ewes will go wherever you lead them, but the wethers will not, having strong opinions and meaning to abide by them. And one man I noticed was of the wethers, to wit, the Duke of Norfolk, who stopped outside with the sword of state like a beadle with a rapping rod. This has taken more to tell than the time it happened in. For after all,

the men were gone, some to this side, some to that, according to their feelings, a number of ladies, beautifully dressed, being of the queen's retinue, began to enter and were stared at three times as much as the men had been. And, indeed, they were worth looking at, but none was so well worth eye-service as my own beloved Lorna. She entered modestly and shyly, with her eyes upon the ground, knowing the rudeness of the gallants and the large sum she was priced at. Her dress was of the purest white, very sweet and simple without a line of ornament, for she herself adorned it. The way she walked and touched her skirt, rather than seemed to hold it up, with a white hand bearing one red rose—this, and her stately, supple neck, and the flowing of her hair would show, at a distance of a hundred yards that she could be none but Lorna Doone. Lorna Doone of my early love in the days when she blushed for her name before me by reason of dishonesty, but now the Lady Lorna Dugal, as far beyond reproach as above my poor affection. All my heart and all my mind gathered themselves upon her. Would she see me, or would she pass? Was there instinct in our love?

By some strange chance she saw me. Or was it through our destiny? While with eyes kept seduously on the marble floor, to shun the weight of admiration thrust too boldly on them, while with shy, quick steps she passed, some one, perhaps with purpose, trod on the skirt of her white dress. With the quickness taught her by many a scene of danger, she looked up, and her eyes met mine.

As I gazed upon her, steadfastly, yearningly, yet with some reproach, and more of pride than humility, she made me one of the courtly bows which I do so much detest; yet even that was sweet and graceful when my Lorna did it. But the color of her pure clear cheeks was nearly as deep as that of my own when she went on for the religious work. And the shining of her eyes was owing to an unpaid debt of tears.

Upon the whole, I was satisfied. Lorna had seen me and had not, according to the phrase of the high world then, even tried to "cut" me.

As I waited, a lean man with a yellow beard, came up to me, working sideways, in the manner of a female crab.

"This is not to my liking," I said; "if aught thou hast, speak plainly while they make that horrible noise inside."

Nothing had this man to say, but with many sighs, because I was not of the proper faith, he took my reprobate hand to save me and with several religious tears looked up at me, and winked with one eye. Athough the skin of my palms was thick, I felt a little suggestion there, as of a gentle leaf in spring fearing to seem too forward. I paid the man, and he went happy.

Then I lifted up the little billet he had given me; and in that dark corner read it, with a strong rainbow of colors coming from the angled light. And in mine eyes there was enough to make rainbow of strongest sun as my anger clouded off.

Not that it began so well; but that in my heart I knew, ere three lines were through me, that I was with all heart loved—and beyond that, who may need? The darling of my life went on as if I were of her own rank, or even better than she was; and she dotted her "i's" and crossed her "t's," as if I were at least a schoolmaster. All of it was done in pencil, but as plain as plain could be. My love told me in her letter to come and see her.

CHAPTER XLIV

LORNA STILL IS LORNA

WHEN I came to Earl Brandir's house on Monday, my natural modesty forbade me to appear at the door for guests; therefore I went to the entrance for servants and retainers. Here, to my great surprise, who should come and let me in but little Gwenny Carfax, whose very existence had almost escaped my recollection. Her mistress, no doubt, had seen me coming, and sent her to save trouble. But when I offered to kiss Gwenny in my joy and comfort to see a farmhouse face again, she looked ashamed, and turned away, and would hardly speak to me.

I followed her to a little room, furnished very daintily; and there she ordered me to wait, in a most ungracious manner. "Well," thought I, "if the mistress and the maid are alike in temper, better it had been for me to abide at Master Ramsack's." But almost ere my thought was done I heard the light, quick step which I knew so well.

Almost ere I hoped, the velvet hangings of the doorway parted, and Lorna, in her perfect beauty, stood before the crimson folds, and her dress was all pure white, and her cheeks were rosy pink, and her lips were scarlet.

Like a maiden, with skill and sense checking violent impulse, she stayed there for one moment only, just to be admired; and then, like a woman, she came to me, seeing how alarmed I was. The hand she offered me I took, and raised it to my lips with fear, as a thing too good for me. "Is that all?" she whispered, and then her eyes gleamed up at me; and in another instant she was weeping on my breast.

"Darling Lorna, Lady Lorna," I cried in astonishment, yet unable but to keep her closer to me, and closer; "surely, though I love you so, this is not as it should be."

"Yes, it is, John. Yes, it is. Nothing else should ever be. Oh, why have you behaved so?"

Lorna in her perfect beauty, stood before the crimson folds.

—*Page 290*

"I am behaving," I replied, "to the very best of my ability. There is no other man in the world could hold you so without kissing you."

"Then why don't you do it, John?" asked Lorna, looking up at me with a flash of her old fun.

Now this matter, proverbially, is not for discussion and repetition. Enough that we said nothing more than, "Oh, John, how glad I am!" and "Lorna, Lorna, Lorna!" for about five minutes. Then my darling drew back proudly, and with blushing cheeks and tear bright eyes, she began to cross-examine me.

"Master John Ridd, you tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I have been in Chancery, sir, and can detect a story. Now why have you never, for more than a twelvemonth, taken the smallest notice of your old friend, Mistress Lorna Doone?" Although she spoke in this lightsome manner, as if it made no difference, I saw that her quick heart was moving, and the flash of her eyes controlled.

"Simply for this cause," I answered, "that my old friend, and true love, took not the smallest heed of me. Nor knew I where to find her."

"What!" cried Lorna and nothing more, being overcome with wondering and much inclined to fall away, but for my assistance. I told her, over and over again, that not a single syllable of any message from her, or tidings of her welfare had reached me or any one of us, since the letter she left behind, except by soldiers' gossip.

"Oh, you poor dear John!" said Lorna, sighing at the thought of my misery; "how wonderfully good of you, thinking of me as you must have done, not to marry that little plain thing, or perhaps I should say that lovely creature, for I have never seen her, Mistress Ruth—I forget her name, but something like a towel."

"Ruth Huckaback is a worthy maid," I answered, with some dignity; "and she alone of all our world, except, indeed, poor Annie, has kept her confidence in you, and told me not to dread your rank, but trust your heart, Lady Lorna."

"Then Ruth is my best friend," she answered, "and is worthy of you, John. And now remember one thing, dear; if God should part us, as may be by nothing short of death, try to marry that

little Ruth when you cease to remember me. And now for the head traitor. I have often suspected it; for she looks me in the face and wishes fearful things which I cannot repeat."

With these words, she moved an implement such as I had not seen before, and which made a ringing noise at a serious distance. And before I had ceased wondering—for if such things go on we might ring the church bells while sitting in our back kitchen—little Gwenny Carfax came, with a grave and sullen face.

"Gwenny," began my Lorna, in a tone of high rank and dignity, "go and fetch the letters which I gave you at various times for despatch to Mistress Ridd."

"How can I fetch them when they are gone? It be no use for him to tell no lies—"

"Now, Gwenny, can you look at me?" I asked very sternly; for the matter was no joke to me, after a year's unhappiness.

"I don't want to look at 'ee. What should I look at a young man for, although he did offer to kiss me?"

I saw the spite and impudence of this last remark and so did Lorna, although she could not quite refrain from smiling.

"Now, Gwenny, not to speak of that," said Lorna, very demurely, "if you thought it honest to keep the letters, was it honest to keep the money?"

At this the Cornish maiden broke into a rage of honesty. "A putt the money by for 'ee. 'Ee shall have every farden of it. And so she flung out of the room.

"And, Gwenny," said Lorna very softly, following under the door hangings; "if it is not honest to keep the money, it is not honest to keep the letters, which would have been worth more than any gold to those who were so kind to you. Your father shall know the whole, Gwenny, unless you tell the truth."

"Now, I will tell you all the truth," this strange maiden answered, talking to herself at least as much as to her mistress, while she went out of sight and hearing. And then I was so glad at having my own Lorna once again, cleared of all contempt for us, and true to me through all of it, that I would have forgiven Gwenny for treason, or even forgery.

"I trusted her so much," said Lorna in her old ill-fortuned way; "and look how she has deceived me! That is why I love you,

John, because you never told me falsehood; and you never could, you know."

"Well, I am not so sure of that. I think I could tell any lie to have you, darling, you know."

"Yes. And perhaps it might be right to other people besides us two. But you could not do it to me, John. You never could do it to me, you know."

Before I quite perceived my way to the bottom of this distinction—although beyond doubt a valid one—Gwenny came back with a leathern bag and tossed it upon the table. Not a word did she vouchsafe to us, but stood there, looking injured.

"Go and get your letters, John," said Lorna, very gravely; "or, at least, your mother's letters, made of messages to you. As for Gwenny, she shall go before Lord Justice Jeffreys." I knew that Lorna meant it not but thought that the girl deserved a frightening, as indeed she did. But we both mistook the courage of this child of Cornwall. She stepped upon a little round thing, in the nature of a stool, such as I never had seen before, and thus delivered her sentiments:

'And you may take me, if you please, before the great Lord Jefferays. I have done no more than duty, though I did it crookedly, and told a heap of lies for your sake. And pretty gratitude I gets."

"Much gratitude you have shown," replied Lorna, "to Master Ridd for all his kindness and his goodness to you. Who was it that went down, at the peril of his life, and brought your father to you when you had lost him for months and months? Who was it? Answer me, Gwenny!"

"Girt Jan Ridd," said the handmaid, very sulkily.

"What made you treat me so, little Gwenny?" I asked, for Lorna would not ask, lest the reply should vex me.

"Because 'ee be'est below her so. Her shanna' have a poor farmering chap, not even if he ere a Carnishman. All her land, and all her birth—and who be you, I'd like to know?"

"Gwenny, you may go," said Lorna, reddening with quiet anger; "and remember that you come not near me for the next three days. It is the only way to punish her," she continued to me, when the maid was gone, in a storm of sobbing and weeping. "Now,

for the next three days she will scarcely touch a morsel of food, and scarcely do a thing but cry. Make up your mind to one thing, John, if you mean to take me for better for worse, you will have to take Gwenny with me."

"I would take you with fifty Gwennies," said I, "although every one of them hated me, which I do not believe this little maid does, in the bottom of her heart."

"No one can possibly hate you, John," she answered very softly, and I was better pleased with this than if she had called me the most noble and glorious man in the kingdom.

After this we spoke of ourselves and the way people would regard us, supposing that when Lorna came to be her own free mistress, she were to throw her rank aside, and refuse her title, and, caring not a fig for folk who cared less than a fig-stalk for her, should shape her mind to its native bent, and to my perfect happiness.

Not that we could not keep her well, comfortably, and with nice clothes, and plenty of flowers and fruit and landscape, and the knowledge of our neighbors' affairs, and their kind interest in our own. Still, this would not be as if she were the owner of a county and a haughty title, and able to lead the first men of the age by her mind and face and money.

Therefore was I quite resolved not to have a word to say while this young queen of wealth and beauty, and of noblemen's desire, made her mind up how to act for her purest happiness. But, to do her justice, this was not the first thing she was thinking of; the test of her judgment was only this, "How will my love be happiest?"

"Now, John," she cried, for she was so quick that she always had my thoughts beforehand, "why will you be backward, as if you cared not for me? Do you dream that I am doubting? My mind has been made up, good John, that you must be my husband, for—well, I will not say how long, lest you should laugh at my folly. But I believe it was ever since you came with your stockings off and the loaches. Right early for me to make up my mind; but you know that you made up yours, John, and, of course, I knew it, and that had a great effect on me. Now, after all this age of loving, shall a trifle sever us?"

I told her that it was no trifle, but a most important thing, to abandon wealth and honor and the brilliance of high life, and be despised by every one for such abundant folly. Moreover, that I should appear a knave for taking advantage of her youth and boundless generosity. And I told her outright, that she was bound to consult her guardian, and that without his knowledge I would come no more to see her. Her flash of pride at these last words made her look like an empress; and I was about to explain myself better, but she put forth her hand and stopped me.

"I think that condition should rather have proceeded from me. You are mistaken, Master Ridd, in supposing that I would think of receiving you in secret. It was a different thing in Glen Doone, where all except yourself were thieves, and when I was but a simple child and oppressed with constant fear. You are quite right in threatening to visit me thus no more; but I think you might have waited for an invitation, sir."

"And you are quite right, Lady Lorna, in pointing out my presumption. It is a fault that must ever be found in any speech of mine to you."

"This I said so humbly, and not with any bitterness—for I knew that I had gone too far—and made her so polite a bow, that she forgave me in a moment, and we begged each other's pardon.

"Now, will you allow me just to explain my own view of this matter, John?" said she, once more my darling. "It may be a very foolish view, but I shall never change it. Please not to interrupt me, dear, until you have heard me to the end. In the first place, it is quite certain that neither you nor I can be happy without the other. Then what stands between us? Worldly position, and nothing else. I have no more education than you have, John Ridd; nay, and not so much. My birth and ancestry are not one whit more pure than yours, although they may be better known. Your descent from ancient freeholders, for five-and-twenty generations of good, honest men, although you bear no coat of arms, is better than the lineage of nine proud English noblemen out of every ten I meet with. In manners, though your mighty strength and hatred of any meanness sometimes break out in violence—of which I must try to cure you, dear—in manners, if kindness and gentleness and modesty are the true things wanted, you are immeasurably above

any of our court gallants, who, indeed, have very little. As for difference of religion, we allow for one another, neither having been brought up in a bitterly pious manner."

Here, though the tears were in my eyes at the loving things love said of me, I could not help a little laugh at the notion of any bitter piety being found among the Doones, or even in mother, for that matter. Lorna smiled in her slyest manner, and went on again.

"Now, you see, I have proved my point; there is nothing between us but worldly position—if you can defend me against the Doones, for which, I trow, I may trust you. And worldly position means wealth and title, and the right to be in great houses, and the pleasure of being envied. I have not been here for a year, John, without learning something. Oh, I hate it; how I hate it! Of all the people I know, there are but two, besides my uncle, who do not either covet or detest me. And who are those two, think you?"

"Gwenny, for one," I answered.

"Yes, Gwenny, for one, and the queen, for the other. The one is too far below me and the other too high above. As for the women who dislike me, without having even heard my voice, I simply have nothing to do with them. As for the men who covet me for my land and money, I merely compare them with you, John Ridd, and all thought of them is over. Oh, John, you must never forsake me, however cross I am to you. I thought you would have gone just now, and though I would not move to stop you, my heart would have broken."

"You don't catch me going in a hurry," I answered, very sensibly, "when the loveliest maiden in the world, and the best and the dearest, loves me. All my fear of you is gone, darling Lorna, all my fear—"

"Is it possible you could fear me, John, after all we have been through together? Now you promised not to interrupt me; is this fair behavior? Well, let me see where I left off—oh, that my heart would have broken. Upon that point I will say no more, lest you should grow conceited, John, if anything could make you so. But I do assure you that half London—however, upon that point also I will check my power of speech, lest you think me conceited. And

now, to put aside all nonsense; though I have talked none for a year, John, having been so unhappy, and now it is such a relief to me—"

"Then talk it for an hour," said I, "and let me sit and watch you. To me it is the very sweetest of all sweetest wisdom."

"Nay, there is no time," she answered, glancing at a jewelled timepiece, scarcely larger than an oyster, which she drew from near her waistband; and then she pushed it away in confusion, lest its wealth should startle me. "My uncle will come home in less than half an hour, dear, and you are not the one to take a side-passage and avoid him. I shall tell him that you have been here, and that I mean you to come again."

As Lorna said this, with a manner as confident as need be, I saw that she had learned in town the power of her beauty, and knew that she could do with most men aught she set her mind upon. And as she stood there, flushed with pride and faith in her own loveliness, and radiant with the love itself, I felt that she must do exactly as she pleased with every one. For now, in turn and elegance and richness and variety, there was nothing to compare with her face, unless it were her figure. Therefore, I gave in, and said:

"Darling, do just what you please; only make no rogue of me."

For that she gave me the simplest, kindest, and sweetest of all kisses; and I went down the great stairs grandly, thinking of nothing else but that.

CHAPTER XLV

JOHN IS JOHN NO LONGER

IT would be hard for me to tell the state of mind in which I lived for a long time after this. I put away from me all torment and the thought of future cares and the sight of difficulty, and to myself appeared, which means that I became, the luckiest of lucky fellows since the world itself began.

Although there were no soldiers now quartered at Plover's Barrows, all being busied in harrassing the country, and hanging the people where the rebellion had thriven most, my mother, having received from me a message containing my place of abode, contrived to send me, by the pack horses, as fine a packet as need be of provisions and money and other comforts. Therein I found, addressed to Colonel Jeremiah Stickles in Lizzie's best handwriting, half a side of the dried deer's flesh in which he rejoiced so greatly, Also, for Lorna, a fine green goose, with a little salt towards the tail, and new-laid eggs, as well as a bottle of brandied cherries, and seven, or, it may have been, eight pounds of fresh home-made butter. Moreover, to myself there was a letter. I read that the Doones were quiet, the parishes round about having united to feed them well through the harvest time, so that after the day's hard work the farmers might go to bed at night. And this plan had been found to answer well, and to save much trouble on both sides, so that everybody wondered it had not been done before. But Lizzie thought that the Doones could hardly be expected much longer to put up with it, and probably would not have done so now but for a little adversity, to wit, that the famous Colonel Kirke had, in the most outrageous manner, hanged no less than six of them, who were captured among the rebels. For he said that men of their rank and breeding, and, above all, of their religion, should have known better than to join plough boys and carters and pickaxe men against our lord the king and his holy holiness the pope. This hanging of so many Doones caused some

indignation among people who were used to them; and it seemed for a while to check the rest from any spirit of enterprise.

Moreover, I found from this same letter, which was pinned upon the knuckle of a leg of mutton for fear of being lost in straw, that good Tom Faggus was at home again, and nearly cured of his dreadful wound, but intended to go to war no more, only to mind his family.

Lorna was greatly pleased with the goose and the butter and the brandied cherries; and the Earl Brandir himself declared that he never tasted better than those last, and would beg the young man from the country to procure him instructions for making them. This nobleman, being as deaf as a post and of a very solid mind, could never be brought to understand the nature of my thoughts towards Lorna. He looked upon me as an excellent youth, who had rescued the maiden from the Doones whom he cordially detested; and learning that I had thrown two of them out of window, he patted me on the back, and declared that his doors would ever be open to me, and that I could not come too often.

I thought this very kind of his lordship, especially as it enabled me to see my darling Lorna, not, indeed, as often as I wished. but, at any rate, very frequently.

Lorna said to me one day, being in a state of excitement, whereto she was over prone when reft of my slowness to steady her:

"I will tell him, John; I must tell him, John. It is mean of me to conceal it."

I thought that she meant all about our love, which we had endeavored thrice to drill into the Earl's fine old ears, but could not make him comprehend without risk of bringing the house down; and so I said, "By all means, darling, have another try at it."

Lorna, however, looked at me—for her eyes told more than tongue—as much as to say, "Well, you are a stupid. We agreed to let that subject rest." And then she saw that I was vexed at my own want of quickness, and so she spoke very kindly:

"I meant about his poor son, dearest; the son of his old age almost, whose loss threw him into that dreadful cold—for he went, without hat, to look for him—which ended in his losing the use of his dear old ears. I believe, if we could only get him to Plover's Barrows for a month, he would be able to hear again. And look

at his age! He is not much over seventy, John, you know; and I hope that you will be able to hear me long after you are seventy, John."

"Well," said I, "God settles that. Or, at any rate, he leaves us time to think about those questions when we are over fifty. Now let me know what you want, Lorna. The idea of my being seventy! But you would still be beautiful."

"To the one who loves me," she answered, trying to make wrinkles in her pure bright forehead; "but if you will have common sense, as you always will, John, whether I wish it or otherwise—I want to know whether I am bound in honor and in conscience to tell my dear and good old uncle what I know about his son?"

"First let me understand quite clearly," said I, never being in a hurry except when passion moves me, "what his lordship thinks at present, and how far his mind is urged with sorrow and anxiety." This was not the first time we had spoken of the matter.

"Why, you know, John, well enough," she answered, wondering at my coolness, "that my poor uncle still believes that his one beloved son will come to light and life again. He has made all arrangements accordingly; all his property is settled on that supposition. He knows that young Alan always was what he calls a 'freckless ne'er-do-weel;' but he loves him all the more for that. He cannot believe that he will die without his son coming back to him, and he always has a bedroom ready. He has made me work him a pair of slippers from the size of a mouldy boot. Now you know how deaf he is; but if any one says 'Alan,' even in the place outside the door, he will make his courteous bow to the very highest visitor, and be out there in a moment, and search the entire passage, and yet let no one know it."

"It is a piteous thing," I said; for Lorna's eyes were full of tears.

"And he means me to marry him. It is the pet scheme of his life. I am to grow more beautiful, and more highly taught and graceful, until it pleases Alan to come back and demand me. Can you understand this matter, John? Or do you think my uncle mad?"

"Lorna, I should be mad myself to call any other man mad for hoping."

"Then will you tell me what to do? It makes me very sorrowful. For I know that Alan Brandir lies below the sod in Doone Valley."

"And if you tell his father," I answered softly, but clearly, "in a few weeks he will lie below the sod in London; at least, if there is any."

"Perhaps you are right, John," she replied; "to lose hope must be a dreadful thing, when one is turned of seventy. Therefore, I will never tell him."

The good Earl Brandir was a man of the noblest charity. True charity begins at home, and so did his, and was afraid of losing the way if it went abroad. So this good nobleman kept his money in a handsome pewter box, with his coat of arms upon it, and a double lid and locks. Moreover, there was a heavy chain, fixed to a staple in the wall so that none might carry off the pewter with the gold inside of it. Lorna told me the box was full, for she had seen him go to it, and she often thought that it would be nice for us to begin the world with. I told her that she must not allow her mind to dwell upon things of this sort.

Now, one evening towards September, when the days were drawing in, looking back at the house to see whether Lorna were looking after me, I espied a pair of villainous fellows watching from the thicket corner some hundred yards or so behind the good earl's dwelling. "There is mischief afoot," thought I to myself, being thoroughly conversant with theft from my knowledge of the Doones; "how will be the moon tonight, and when may we expect the watch?"

I found that neither moon nor watch could be looked for until the morning; the moon, of course, before the watch, and more likely to be punctual. Therefore, I resolved to wait and see what those two villains did, and save, if it were possible, the Earl of Brandir's pewter box. But, inasmuch as those bad men were almost sure to have seen me leaving the house and looking back, and striking out on the London road, I marched along at a merry pace until they could not discern me; and then I fetched a compass round, and refreshed myself at a certain inn, entitled "The Cross-Bones and Buttons."

Here I remained until it was very nearly as dark as pitch; and

the house being full of footpads and cut-throats, I thought it right to leave them. One or two came after me, in the hope of designing a stratagem, but I dropped them in the darkness; and knowing all the neighborhood well, I took up my position, two hours before midnight, among the shrubs at the eastern end of Lord Brandir's mansion. Hence, although I might not see, I could scarcely fail to hear, if any unlawful entrance, either at back or front, were made.

From my own observation I thought it likely that the attack would be in the rear; and so, indeed, it came to pass. For when all the lights were quenched and all the house was quiet, I heard a low and wily whistle from a clump of trees close by; and then three figures passed between me and a whitewashed wall, and came to a window which opened into a part of the servants' basement. This window was carefully raised by some one inside the house, and, after a little whispering and something which sounded like a kiss, all the three men entered.

"Oh, you villain!" I said to myself, "this is worse than any Doone job, because there is treachery in it." But, without waiting to consider the subject from a moral point of view, I crept along the wall, and entered very quietly after them; being rather uneasy about my life, because I bore no firearms, and had nothing more than my holly staff for even a violent combat.

I went along very delicately, as a man who has learned to wrestle can do although he may weigh twenty stone, following carefully the light brought by the traitorous maid, and shaking in her loose, dishonest hand. I saw her lead the men into a little place called a pantry, and there she gave them cordials, and I could hear them boasting.

I followed them from this drinking-bout by the aid of the light they bore as far as Earl Brandir's bedroom, which I knew, because Lorna had shown it to me that I might admire the tapestry.

Now, keeping well away in the dark, yet nearer than was necessary to my own dear Lorna's room, I saw these fellows try the door of the good Earl Brandir, knowing from the maid, of course, that his lordship could hear nothing, except the name of Alan. They tried the lock, and pushed at it, and even set their knees upright; but a Scottish nobleman may be trusted to secure

his door at night. So they were forced to break it open, and at this the guilty maid, or woman, ran away. These three rogues burst into Earl Brandir's room with a light and a crowbar and firearms.

When I came to the door of the room, being myself in shadow, I beheld two bad men trying vainly to break open the pewter box, and the third with a pistol muzzle laid to the night cap of his lordship. With foul face and yet fouler words, this man was demanding the key of the box, which the other man could by no means open, neither drag it from the chain.

"I tell you," said the aged earl, beginning to understand at last what these rogues were up for, "I will give no key to you. It all belongs to my boy Alan; no one else shall have a farthing."

"Then you may count your moments, lord. The key is in your old cramped hand. One, two and at three I shoot you."

I saw that the old man was abroad, not with fear, but with great wonder, and the regrets of deafness. And I saw that rather would he be shot than let these men rob his son, buried now, or laid to bleach in the tangles of the wood, three, or it might be four years agone, but still alive to his father. Hereupon my heart was moved, and I resolved to interfere. The thief with the pistol began to count as I crossed the floor very quietly, while the old earl fearfully gazed at the muzzle, but clinched still tighter his wrinkled hand. The villain, with hair all over his eyes and the great horse pistol levelled, cried "three," and pulled the trigger; but luckily, at that very moment, I struck up the barrel with my staff so that the shot pierced the tester and then, with a spin and a thwack, I brought the good holly down upon the rascal's head in a manner which stretched him upon the floor.

Meanwhile the other two robbers had taken the alarm and rushed at me, one with a pistol and one with a hanger which forced me to be very lively. Fearing the pistol most, I flung the heavy velvet curtain of the bed across, that he might not see where to aim at me, and then, stooping very quickly, I caught up the senseless robber, and set him up for a shield and target; whereupon he was shot immediately, without having the pain of knowing it, and a happy thing it was for him. Now the other two were at my mercy, being men below the average strength; and no hanger, except in most skillful hands, as well as firm and strong

ones, has any chance to a powerful man armed with a stout cudgel and thoroughly practised in single stick.

So I took these two rogues and bound them together, and leaving them under charge of the butler, I myself went in search of the constables, whom, after some few hours, I found. In the morning these two men were brought before the justice of the peace, and now my wonderful luck appeared. For the merit of having defeated and caught them would never have raised me one step in the state, or in public consideration, if they had been only common robbers, or even notorious murderers. But when these fellows were recognized by some one in the court as Protestant witnesses out of employment, companions and under-strappers to Oates and Bedloe and Carstairs, and hand in glove with Dangerfield, Tuberville and Dugdale—in a word, the very men against whom his majesty the king bore the bitterest rancor, but whom he had hitherto failed to catch—when this was laid before the public, at least a dozen men came up, whom I had never seen before, and prayed me to accept their congratulations.

I answered them very modestly and each according to his worth, as stated by himself, who, of course, could judge the best. The magistrate made me many compliments, ten times more than I deserved, and took good care to have them copied that his majesty might see them. And ere the case was thoroughly heard, and these poor fellows were committed, more than a score of generous men had offered to lend me a hundred pounds wherewith to buy a new court suit when called before his majesty.

In the course of that same afternoon I was sent for by his majesty. He had summoned first the good Earl Brandir and received the tale from him, not without exaggeration, although my lord was a Scotchman.

In great alarm and flurry, I put on my best clothes, and hired a fashionable hair-dresser. Then forth I set with my holly staff, wishing myself well out of it. I was shown at once, and before I desired it, into his majesty's presence, and there I stood most humbly, and made the best bow I could think of.

As I could not advance any farther—for I saw that the queen was present, which frightened me tenfold—his majesty, in the most gracious manner, came down the room to encourage me. And

as I remained with my head bent down, he told me to stand up and look at him.

"I have seen thee before, young man," he said; "thy form is not one to be forgotten. Where was it? Thou art most likely to know."

"May it please Your Most Gracious Majesty the King," I answered, finding my voice in a manner which surprised myself, "it was in the royal chapel."

Now I meant no harm whatever by this. I ought to have said the "ante-chapel," but I could not remember the word, and feared to keep the king looking at me.

"I am well pleased," said his majesty, with a smile which almost made his dark and stubborn face look pleasant, "to find that our greatest subject—greates, I mean, in the bodily form—is a good Catholic. Thou needest not say otherwise. The time shall be, and that right soon, when men shall be proud of the one true faith." Here he stopped, having gone rather far, but the gleam of his heavy eyes was such that I dared not contradict.

"This is that great Johann Reed," said her majesty, coming forward, because the king was in meditation, "of whom I have so much heard from the dear, dear Lorna. Ah, she is not of this black countree, she of the breet Italie."

I have tried to write it as she said it, but it wants a better scholar to express her mode of speech.

"Now, John Ridd," said the king, recovering from his thoughts about the true church, and thinking that his wife was not to take the lead upon me, "thou hast done great service to the realm, and to religion. It was good to save Earl Brandir, a loyal and Catholic nobleman, but it was great service to catch two of the vilest blood hounds ever laid on by heretics. And to make them shoot another; it was rare—it was rare, my lad. Now ask us anything in reason; thou canst carry any honors on thy club, like Hercules. What is thy chief ambition, lad?"

"Well," said I, after thinking a little, and meaning to make the most of it, for so the queen's eyes conveyed to me, "my mother always used to think that having been schooled at Tiverton, with thirty marks a year to pay, I was worthy of a coat of arms; and that is what she longs for."

"A good lad! a very good lad," said the king, and he looked at the queen as if almost in joke; "but what is thy condition in life?"

"I am a freeholder," I answered in my confusion, "ever since the time of King Alfred. A Ridd was with him in the isle of Athelney, and we hold our farm by gift from him; or, at least, people say so. We have had three very good harvests running, and might support a coat of arms; but for myself, I want it not."

"Thou shalt have a coat, my lad," said the king, smiling at his own humor; "but it must be a large one to fit thee. And more than that shalt thou have, John Ridd, being of such loyal breed, and having done such service."

And while I wondered what he meant, he called to some of the people in waiting at the farther end of the room, and they brought him a little sword such as Annie would skewer a turkey with. Then he signified to me to kneel, which I did, after dusting the board for the sake of my best breeches, and then he gave me a little tap very nicely upon my shoulder, before I knew what he was up to; and said, "Arise, Sir John Ridd!"

This astonished and amazed me to such extent of loss of mind, that when I got up I looked about, and thought what the neighbors would think of it. And I said to the king, without forms of speech:

"Sir, I am very much obliged. But what be I to do with it?"

The coat of arms, devised for me by the royal heralds, was of great size, and rich colors, and full of bright imaginings. They did me the honor to consult me first, and to take no notice of my advice. For I begged that there might be a good-sized cow on it, so as to stamp our pats of butter before they went to market; also a horse on the other side, and a flock snowed up at the bottom. But the gentlemen would not hear of this, and, to find something more appropriate, they inquired strictly into the annals of our family. I told them, of course, all about King Alfred; upon which they settled that one quarter should be three cakes on a bar, with a lion regardant, done upon a field of gold. Also I told them that very likely there had been a Ridd in the battle fought not very far from Plover's Barrows by the Earl of Devon against the Danes, when Hubba, their chief, was killed, and the sacred stan-

dard taken. As some of the Danes are said to be buried even upon land of ours, and we call their graves even to this day "barrows," the heralds quite agreed with me that a Ridd might have been there, or thereabouts; and if he was there, he was almost certain to have done his best, being in sight of hearth and home. And it was plain that he must have had good legs to be at the same time both there and in Athelney; and good legs are an argument for good arms: and supposing a man of this sort to have done his utmost, as the manner of the Ridds is, it was next to certain that he himself must have captured the standard. Moreover, the name of our farm was pure proof, a plover being a wild bird, just the same as a raven is. Upon this chain of reasoning, and without any weak misgiving, they charged my growing escutcheon with a black raven on a ground of red. And the next thing which I mentioned possessing absolute certainty, to wit, that a pig with two heads had been born upon our farm, not more than two hundred years agone, although he died within a week, my third quarter was made at once, by a two-headed boar with noble tusks, sable upon silver. All this was very fierce and fine, and so I pressed for a peaceful corner in the lower dexter, and obtained a wheat-sheaf set upright, gold upon a field of green.

Here I was inclined to pause and admire the effect, for even De Whichehalse could not show a bearing so magnificent. But the heralds said that it looked a mere sign-board, without a good motto under it; and the motto must have my name in it. They offered me first, "Ridd non ridendus," but I said, "Gentlemen, let me forget my Latin." Then they proposed, "Ridd readeth riddles," but I begged them not to set down such a lie, for no Ridd ever had made, or made out, such a thing as a riddle since Exmoor itself began. Thirdly, they gave me, "Ridd never be ridden," and fearing to make any further objections, I let them inscribe it in bronze upon blue. The heralds thought that the king would pay for this noble achievement, but his majesty, although graciously pleased with their ingenuity, declined in the most decided manner to pay a farthing towards it; and as I had now no money left, the heralds became as blue as azure, and as red as gules; until her majesty the queen came forward very kindly, and said that if his majesty gave me a coat of arms, I was not to pay for it; therefore she herself did

so quite handsomely, and felt good-will towards me in consequence.

Beginning to be short of money, and growing anxious about the farm, longing also to show myself and my noble escutcheon to mother, I took advantage of Lady Lorna's interest with the queen to obtain my acquittance and full discharge from even nominal custody. It had been intended to keep me in waiting until the return of Lord Jeffreys from that awful circuit of shambles through which his name is still used by mothers to frighten their children into bed. And right glad was I—for even London shrank with horror at the news—to escape a man so bloodthirsty, savage, and, even to his friends, malignant.

Earl Brandir was greatly pleased with me, not only for having served his life, but for saving that which he valued more, the wealth laid by for Lord Alan. And he introduced me to many great people, who quite kindly encouraged me, and promised to help me in every way when they heard how the king had spoken. As for the furrier, he could never have enough of my society. As I had found him many a Sunday furbishing up old furs for new, with a glaze to conceal the moths' ravages, I begged him to reconsider the point, and not to demand such accuracy. He said: "Well, well; all trades had tricks, especially the trick of business; and I must take him—if I were his true friend—according to his own description." This I was glad enough to do, because it saved so much trouble, and I had no money to spend with him. But still he requested the use of my name, and I begged him to do the best with it, as I never had kept a banker. And the "John Ridd cuffs," and the "Sir John mantles," and the "Holly-staff capes," he put into his window as the winter was coming on, ay, and sold, for everybody was burning with gossip about me, must have made this good man's fortune.

Lorna cried when I came away, and she sent a whole trunkful of things for mother and Annie and even Lizzie. And she seemed to think, though she said it not, that I made my own occasion for going, and might have stayed on till the winter. Whereas I knew well that my mother would think that here I had been in London lagging, and taking my pleasure, and looking at shops upon pretence of king's business, and leaving the harvest to reap itself, not to mention the spending of money; while all the time there

was nothing whatever, except my own love of adventure and sport, to keep me from coming home again. But I knew that my coat of arms and title would turn every bit of this grumbling into fine admiration.

And so it fell out, to a greater extent than even I desired; for all the parishes round about united in a sumptuous dinner at the Mother Meldrum inn—for now that good lady was dead, and her name and face set on a sign-post—to which I was invited, so that it was as good as a summons. And if my health was no better next day, it was not from want of good wishes, any more than from stint of the liquor.

It is needless to say that the real gentry for a long time treated my new honors with contempt and ridicule; but gradually, as they found that I was not such a fool as to claim any equality with them, but went about my farm work, and threw another man at wrestling, and touched my hat to the magistrate just the same as ever, some gentlemen of the highest blood—of which we think a great deal more than of gold around our neighborhood—actually expressed a desire to make my acquaintance. And when, in a manner quite straightforward and wholly free from bitterness, I thanked them for this, but declined to go into their company because it would make me uncomfortable, and themselves as well, in a different way, they did what nearly all Englishmen do, when a thing is right and sensible. They shook hands with me.

CHAPTER XLVI

COMPELLED TO VOLUNTEER

AS the winter passed, the Doones were not keeping themselves at home, as in honor they were bound to. Twenty sheep a week, and one fat ox, and two stout red deer, as well as three score bushels of flour, and two hogsheads and a half of cider, and a hundred weight of candles—surely these might have sufficed to keep the people in their place with no thought of wantonness. Nevertheless, it was not so.

They made complaint about everything, too much ewe-mutton, I think it was. And in spite of all the pledges given, they had ridden forth and carried away two maidens of our neighborhood.

There had also been some trouble in our own home during the previous autumn, while yet I was in London. For certain noted fugitives from the army of King Monmouth, having failed to obtain free shipment from the coast near Watersmouth, had returned into the wilds of Exmoor, trusting to luck, and to be comforted among the common people. Neither were they disappointed for a certain length of time; nor in the end was their disappointment caused by fault on our part. Major Wade was one of them, an active and well-meaning man, but prone to fail in courage upon lasting trial, although in a moment ready. Squire John Whichehalse, not the baron, caught him two or three months before my return in Farley farm-house, near Brendon. He had been up at our house several time, and Lizzie thought a great deal of him. And well I know that if at that time I had been in the neighborhood he should not have been taken so easily.

John Birch, the farmer who had sheltered him, was so fearful of punishment that he hanged himself in a few days' time, and even before he was apprehended. But nothing was done to us. By means of Sergeant Bloxham and his good report of us my mother escaped all penalties.

It is likely enough that good folk will think it hard upon our

neighborhood to be threatened, and sometimes heavily punished for kindness and humanity, and yet to be left to help ourselves against tyranny and base rapine. And now at last our gorge was risen and our hearts in tumult. We had borne our troubles long, as a wise and wholesome chastisement, quite content to have some few things of our own unmeddled with. But what could a man dare to call his own, or what right could he have to wish for it, while he left his wife and children at the pleasure of any strangers?

The people came flocking all around me at the blacksmith's gorge and the Brendon alehouse; and I could scarce come out of church but they got me among the tombstones. They all agreed that I was bound to take command and management. I bade them go to the magistrates, but they said they had been too often. Then I told them that I had no wits for ordering of an armament, although I could find fault enough with the one which had not succeeded. But they would hearken to none of this. All they said was, "Try to lead us, and we will try not to run away."

Being pressed still harder and harder, and no one else coming forward to undertake the business, I agreed at last to this; that if the Doones, upon fair challenge, would not endeavor to make amends by giving up our women, then I would lead the expedition, and do my best to subdue them. All our men were content with this, being thoroughly well assured from experience that the haughty robbers would only shoot any man who durst approach them with such a proposal.

And then arose a difficult question—who was to take the risk of making overtures so unpleasant? I waited for the rest to offer; and as none was ready, the burden fell on me, and seemed to be of my own inviting. Hence I undertook the task sooner than reason about it, for to give the cause of everything is worse than to go through with it.

It may have been three of the afternoon when, leaving my witnesses behind, for they preferred the background, I appeared with our Lizzie's white handkerchief upon a kidney-bean stick, at the entrance to the robbers' dwelling. Scarce knowing what might come of it, I had taken the wise precaution of fastening a Bible over my heart and another across my spinal column, in case of

having to run away with rude men shooting after me. For my mother said that it would stop a two-inch bullet with three ounces of powder behind it. I took no weapons, for fear of being misunderstood. But I could not bring myself to think that any of honorable birth would take advantage of an unarmed man coming in guise of peace to them.

And this conclusion of mine held good, at least for a certain length of time; inasmuch as two decent Doones appeared and hearing of my purpose, offered, without violence, to go and fetch the captain, if I would stop where I was and not begin to spy about anything. To this, of course, I agreed at once, for I wanted no more spying because I had thorough knowledge of all ins and outs already. Therefore, I stood waiting steadily, with one hand in my pocket, feeling a sample of corn for market, and the other against the rock, while I wondered to see it so brown already.

Those men came back in a little while with a sharp, short message that Captain Carver would come out and speak to me by and by. Accordingly, I waited long, and we talked about the signs of bloom for the coming apple season, and the rain that had fallen last Wednesday night, and the principal dearth of Devonshire, that it will not grow many cowslips, which we quite agreed to be the prettiest of spring flowers. And all the time I was wondering how many black and deadly deeds these two innocent youths had committed, even since last Christmas.

At length a heavy and haughty step sounded along the stone roof of the way; and then the great Carver Doone drew up, and looked at me rather scornfully—not with any spoken scorn nor flash of strong contumely, but with that air of thinking little and praying not to be troubled which always vexes a man who feels that he ought not to be despised so, and yet knows not how to help it.

"What is it you want, young man?" he asked, as if he had never seen me before.

In spite of that strong loathing which I always felt at sight of him, I commanded my temper moderately, and told him that I was come for his good, and that of his worshipful company, far more than for my own. That a general feeling of indignation had arisen among us at the recent behavior of certain young men, for

which he might not be answerable, and for which we would not condemn him without knowing the rights of the question. But I begged him clearly to understand that a vile and inhuman wrong had been done, and such as we could not put up with. Then he made me a bow of mock courtesy, and replied as follows:

"Sir John, your new honors have turned your poor head, as might have been expected. We are not in the habit of deserting anything that belongs to us, far less our sacred relatives. The insolence of your demand well-nigh outdoes the ingratitude. If there be a man upon Exmoor who has grossly ill-used us, kidnapped our young women, and slain half a dozen of our young men, you are that outrageous rogue, Sir John. And after all this, how have we behaved? We have laid no hand upon your farm, we have even allowed you to take our queen by creeping and crawling treachery; and we have given you leave of absence to help your cousin, the highwayman, and to come home with a title. And now, how do you requite us? By inflaming the boorish indignation at a little frolic of our young men, and by coming with insolent demands, to yield to which would ruin us. Ah, you ungrateful viper!"

As he turned away in sorrow from me, shaking his head at my badness, I became overcome and I feared that I was a villain. And with many bitter pangs, I began to ask myself whether or not this bill of indictment against John Ridd was true. Some of it I knew to be; for instance, about my going away with Lorna very quietly over the snow, and to save my love from being starved away from me. In this there was no creeping, neither crawling treachery; and yet I was so out of training for being charged by other people beyond mine own conscience, that Carver Doone's harsh words came on me like prickly spinach sown with raking. Therefore, I replied, and said:

"It is true that I owe you gratitude, sir, for a certain time of forbearance; and it is to prove my gratitude that I am come here now. I do not think that my evil deeds can be set against your own; although I cannot speak flowingly upon my good deeds, as you can. I took your queen because you starved her, having stolen her long before, and killed her mother and brother."

Carver Doone regarded me with a fearless grandeur.

"I have given thee thy choice, John Ridd," he said, in a lofty manner, which made me drop away under him; "I always wish to do my best with the worst people who come near me. And of all I have ever met with, thou art the very worst, Sir John, and the most dishonest."

Now, after all my laboring to pay every man to a penny, to be charged like this, I say, so amazed me that I stood, with my legs open, and ready for an earthquake. And the scornful way in which he said "Sir John" went to my very heart, reminding me of my littleness. But seeing no use in bandying words, nay, rather the chance of mischief, I did my best to look calmly at him, and to say with a quiet voice, "Farewell, Carver Doone, this time; our day of reckoning is nigh."

"Thou fool, it is come," he cried, leaping aside into the niche of rock by the doorway; "fire!"

Save for the quickness of spring, and readiness, learned in many a wrestling bout, that knavish trick must have ended me; but scarce was the word "fire!" out of his mouth ere I was out of fire by a single bound behind the rocky pillar of the opening. In this jump I was so brisk, that the men who had trained their guns upon me with good-will and daintiness could not check their fingers crooked upon the heavy triggers; and the volley sang with a roar behind it down the avenue of crags.

With one thing and another, and, most of all, the treachery of this dastard scheme, I was so amazed that I turned and ran at the very top of my speed away from these vile fellows; and luckily for me they had not another charge to send after me. And thus, by good fortune, I escaped, but with a bitter heart and mind at their treacherous usage.

Without any further hesitation I agreed to take command of the honest men who were burning to punish, ay, and destroy those outlaws as now beyond all bearing. One condition, however, I made, namely, that the Counsellor should be spared if possible; not because he was less a villain than any of the others, but that he seemed less violent, and, above all, had been good to Annie. And I found hard work to make them listen to my wish upon this point; for of all the Doones, Sir Counsellor had made himself most hated by his love of law and reason.

We arranged that all our men should come and fall into order with pike and musket, over against our hill.

Tom Faggus also joined us heartily, being now quite healed of his wound except at times when the wind was easterly. He was made second in command to me; and I would gladly have had him first, as more fertile in expedients; but he declined such rank, on the plea that I knew most of the seat of war; besides, that I might be held in some measure to draw authority from the king.

Also Uncle Ben came over to help us with his advice and presence, as well as with a band of stout warehousemen, whom he brought from Dulverton. For he had never forgiven the old outrage put upon him; and though it had been to his interest to keep quiet during the last attack under Commander Stickles—for the sake of his secret gold mine—yet now he was in a position to give full vent to his feelings. For he and his partners, when fully assured of the value of their diggings, had obtained from the crown a license to adventure in search of minerals by payment of a heavy fine and yearly royalty. Therefore they had now no longer any cause for secrecy, neither for dread of the outlaws; having so added to their force as to be a match for them. And although Uncle Ben was not the man to keep his miners idle an hour more than might be helped, he promised that when we had fixed the moment for an assault on the valley, a score of them should come to aid us, headed by Simon Carfax, and armed with the guns which they always kept for the protection of their gold.

Now, whether it were Uncle Ben, or whether it were Tom Faggus, or even my own self—for all three of us claimed the sole honor—is more than I think fair to settle without allowing them a voice. But, at any rate, a clever thing was devised among us.

It was known that the Doones were fond of money, as well as strong drink and other things; and more especially fond of gold, when they could get it pure and fine. Therefore it was agreed that in this way we should tempt them, for we knew that they looked with ridicule upon our rustic preparations. After repulsing king's troopers and the militia of two counties, was it likely that they should yield their fortress to a set of plough-boys? We, for our part, felt, of course, the power of this reasoning, and that where regular troops had failed, half-armed countrymen must fail,

except by superior judgment and harmony of action. Though perhaps the militia would have sufficed, if they had only fought against the foe, instead of against each other. From these things we took warning; having failed through over-confidence, was it not possible to make the enemy fail through the self-same cause?

What we devised was this: to entice from home a part of the robbers, and fall by surprise on the other part. We caused it to be spread abroad that a large heap of gold was now collected at the mine of the Wizard's Slough. And when this rumor must have reached them, through women who came to and fro, as some entirely faithful to them were allowed to do, we sent Captain Simon Carfax, the father of little Gwenny, to demand an interview with the Counsellor, by night, and as it were secretly. Then he was to set forth a list of imaginary grievances against the owners of the mine and to offer, partly through resentment, partly through the hope of gain, to betray into their hands, upon the Friday night, by far the greatest weight of gold as yet sent up for refining. He was to have one quarter part and they to take the residue. But inasmuch as the convoy across the moors, under his command, would be strong and strongly armed, the Doones must be sure to send not less than a score of men if possible. He himself, at a place agreed upon and fit for an ambuscade, would call a halt, and contrive in the darkness to pour a little water into the priming of his company's guns.

It cost us some trouble and a great deal of money to bring the sturdy Cornishman into this deceitful part; and perhaps he never would have consented but for his obligation to me and the wrongs of his daughter. However, as he was the man for the task, both from his coolness and courage and being known to have charge of the mine, I pressed him, until he undertook to tell all the lies we required. And right well he did it, too, having once made up his mind to it, and perceiving that his own interests called for the total destruction of the robbers.

CHAPTER XLVII

A LONG ACCOUNT SETTLED

HAVING resolved on a night assault, as our undisciplined men, three fourths of whom had never been shot at, could not fairly be expected to march up to visible musket mouths, we cared not much about drilling our forces, only to teach them to hold a musket so far as we could supply that weapon to those with the cleverest eyes, and to give them familiarity with the noise it made in exploding. And we fixed upon Friday night for our venture, because the moon would be at the full; and our powder was coming from Dulverton on the Friday afternoon.

Uncle Reuben did not mean to expose himself to shooting, his time of life for risk of life being now well over, and the residue too valuable. But his counsels, and his influence, and, above all, his warehousemen, well practiced in beating carpets, were of true service to us. His miners also did great wonders, having a grudge against the Doones; as, indeed, who had not for thirty miles round their valley?

It was settled that the yeomen, having good horses under them, should give account, with the miners' help, of as many Doones as might be despatched to plunder the pretended gold. And as soon as we knew that this party of robbers, be it more or less, was out of hearing from the valley, we were to fall to, ostensibly at the Doone gate which was impregnable now, but in reality upon their rear, by means of my old water-slide. For I had chosen twenty young fellows, partly miners and partly warehousemen and sheep farmers, and some of other vocations, but all to be relied upon for spirit and power of climbing. And with proper tools to aid us and myself to lead the way, I felt no doubt whatever but that we could all attain the crest where first I had met with Lorna.

Upon the whole, I rejoiced that Lorna was not present now. It must have been irksome to her feelings to have all her kindred and old associates, much as she kept aloof from them, put to

death without ceremony, or else putting all of us to death. For all of us were resolved this time to have no more shilly-shallying, but to go through with a bad business in the style of honest Englishmen, when the question comes to "Your life or mine."

There was hardly a man among us who had not suffered bitterly from the miscreants now before us. One had lost his wife, perhaps, another had lost a daughter, another had lost his favorite cow; in a word, there was scarcely any one who had not to complain of a hayrick; and what surprised me then, not now, was that the men least injured made the greatest push concerning it.

The moon was lifting well above the shoulder of the uplands when we, the chosen band, set forth, taking the short cut along the valleys to the foot of the Bagworthy water; and therefore having allowed the rest an hour, to fetch round the moors and hills. We were not to begin our climb until we heard a musket fired from the heights on the left-hand side, where John Fry himself was stationed, upon his own and his wife's request so as to keep out of action. And that was the place where I had been used to sit, and to watch for Lorna. And John Fry was to fire his gun, with a ball of wool inside it, so soon as he heard the hurly-burly at the Doone gate beginning, which we, by reason of the waterfall, could not hear down in the meadows there.

We waited a very long time, with the moon marching up heaven steadfastly, and the white fog trembling in chords and columns, like a silver harp of the meadows. And then the moon drew up the fogs, and scarfed herself in white with them; and so being proud, gleamed upon the water like a bride at her looking-glass; and yet there was no sound of either John Fry or his blunderbuss.

I began to think that the worthy John, being out of all danger, and having brought a counterpane according to his wife's directions, must veritably have gone to sleep, leaving other people to kill, or be killed, so that he were comfortable. But herein I did wrong to John and am ready to acknowledge it, for suddenly the most awful noise that anything short of thunder could make came down among the rocks, and went and hung upon the corners.

"The signal, my lads!" I cried, leaping up and rubbing my eyes; for even now, while condemning John unjustly, I was giving

him right to be hard upon me. "Now hold on by the rope, and lay your quarterstaffs across, my lads, and keep your guns pointing to heaven, lest haply we shoot one another."

"Us sh'n't never shutt one anoother, wi' our goons at that mark, I reckon," said an oldish chap, but as tough as leather, and esteemed a wit for his dryness.

"You come next to me, old Ike; you be enough to dry up the waters; now, remember, all lean well forward. If any man throws his weight back, down he goes; and perhaps he may never get up again; and most likely he will shoot himself."

I was still more afraid of their shooting me; for my chief alarm in this steep ascent was neither of the water, nor of the rocks, but of the loaded guns we bore. If any man slipped, off might go his gun; and however good his meaning, I, being first, was most likely to take far more than I fain would apprehend.

For this cause I had debated with Uncle Ben and with Cousin Tom as to the expediency of our climbing with guns unloaded. But they, not being in the way themselves, assured me that there was nothing to fear except through uncommon clumsiness; and that as for charging our guns at the top, even veteran troops could scarce be trusted to perform it properly in the hurry and the darkness and the noise of fighting before them.

However, though a gun went off, no one was any the worse for it, neither did the Doones notice it in the thick of the firing in front of them. For the orders to those of the sham attack, conducted by Tom Faggus, were to make the greatest possible noise without exposure of themselves until we, in the rear, had fallen to; which John Fry was again to give signal of.

Therefore we of the chosen band stole up the meadow quietly, keeping in the blots of shade and in the hollow of the water course. And the earliest notice the Counsellor had, or any one else, of our presence was the blazing of the log-wood house where lived that villain Carver. It was my especial privilege to set this house on fire; upon which I had insisted, exclusively and conclusively. No other hand but mine should lay a brand, or strike steel on flint for it; I had made all preparations carefully for a goodly blaze. And I must confess that I rubbed my hands with a strong delight and comfort when I saw the home of that man, who had fired

so many houses, having its turn of smoke and blaze and of crackling fury.

We took good care, however, to burn no innocent women or children in that most righteous destruction. For we brought them all out beforehand. One child I noticed as I saved him, a fair and handsome little fellow, whom, if Carver Doone could love anything on earth besides his wretched self, he did love. The boy climbed on my back and rode; and much as I hated his father, it was not in my heart to say or do a thing to vex him.

Leaving these poor injured people to behold their burning home, we drew aside, by my directions, into the covert beneath the cliff. But not before we had laid our brands to three other houses, after calling the women forth, and bidding them go for their husbands to come and fight a hundred of us. In the smoke and rush and fire, they believed that we were a hundred; and away they ran, in consternation, to the battle at the Doone gate.

"All Doone-town is on fire, on fire!" we heard them shrieking as they went; "a hundred soldiers are burning it, with a dreadful great man at the head of them!"

Presently, just as I expected, back came the warriors of the Doones, leaving but two or three at the gate, and burning with wrath to crush under foot the presumptuous clowns in their valley. Just then the waxing fire leaped above the red crest of the cliffs, and danced on the pillars of the forest, and lapped like a tide on the stones of the slope. All the valley flowed with light, and the limpid waters reddened, and the fair young women shone, and the naked children glistened.

But the finest sight of all was to see those haughty men striding down the causeway darkly, reckless of their end, but resolute to have two lives for every one. A finer dozen of young men could not have been found in the world, perhaps, nor a braver, nor a viler one.

Seeing how few there were of them, I was very loath to fire, although I covered the leader, who appeared to be Dashing Charlie; for they were at easy distance now, brightly shown by the firelight, yet ignorant where to look for us. I thought that we might take them prisoners—though slight good that could be, as they must

have been hanged thereafter—any how, I was loath to shoot, or to give the word to my followers.

But my followers waited for no word: they saw a fair shot at the men they abhorred, the men who had robbed them of home or of love; and the chance was too much for their charity. At a signal, a dozen muskets were discharged, and half of the Doones dropped lifeless, like so many logs of firewood, or chopping blocks rolled over.

Although I had seen a great battle before and a hundred times the carnage, this appeared to me to be horrible, and I was at first inclined to fall upon our men for behaving so. But one instant showed me that they were right; for, while the valley was filled with howling and with shrieks of women, and the beams of the blazing houses fell and hissed in the bubbling river, all the rest of the Doones leaped at us like so many demons. They fired wildly, not seeing us well among the hazel-bushes, and then they clubbed their muskets, or drew their swords, as might be, and furiously drove at us.

For a moment, although we were twice their number, we fell back before their valorous fame and the power of their onset. For my part, admiring their courage greatly, and counting it slur upon manliness that two should be down upon one so, I withheld my hand a while; for I cared to meet none but Carver, and he was not among them. The whirl and hurry of this fight, and the hard blows raining down—for now all guns were empty—took away my power of seeing or reasoning upon anything.

But I saw a reckoning come that night, and not a line we missed of it soon as our bad blood was up. I like not to tell of slaughter, though it might be of wolves and tigers; and that was a night of fire and slaughter, and of very long-harbored revenge. Enough that ere the daylight broke upon that wan March morning the only Doones still left alive were the Counsellor and Carver. And of all the dwellings of the Doones, not even one was left, but all made potash in the river.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE COUNSELLOR AND THE CARVER

FROM that great confusion, we returned on the following day, almost as full of anxiety as we were of triumph. In the first place, what could we possibly do with all these women and children, thrown on our hands, with none to protect and care for them? Again, how should we answer to the justices of the peace, or, perhaps, even to Lord Jeffreys, for having, without even a warrant, taken the law into our own hands and abated our nuisance so forcibly? And then, what was to be done with spoil, which was of great value, though the diamond necklace came not to public light? For we saw a mighty host of claimants already leaping up for booty. Every man who had ever been robbed expected usury on his loss; the lords of the manors demanded the whole, and so did the king's commissioner of revenue at Porlock, and so did the men who had fought our battle.

Now this was not as it ought to be, and it seemed as if by burning the nest of robbers we had but hatched their eggs; until, being made sole guardian of the captured treasure, by reason of my known honesty, I hit upon a plan which gave very little satisfaction yet carried this advantage, that the grumblers argued against one another, and for the most part came to blows, which renewed their good-will to me, as being abused by the adversary.

And my plan was no more than this, not to pay a farthing to lord of manor, parson, or even king's commissioner, but after making good some of the recent and proved losses to pay the residue, which might be worth some fifty thousand pounds, into the Exchequer at Westminster, and then let all the claimants file what bills they pleased in Chancery.

Now this was a very noble device, for the mere name of Chancery, and the high repute of the fees therein and low repute of the lawyers, and the comfortable knowledge that the wool-sack itself is the golden fleece, absorbing gold forever if the standard be but pure, staved off at once the lords of the manors, and all the little

farmers, and even those whom most I feared, the parsons. And the king's commissioner was compelled to profess himself contented, although of all he was most aggrieved, for his pickings would have been goodly.

Moreover, by this plan I made a mighty friend, worth all the enemies whom the loss of money moved. The first man now in the kingdom was the great Lord Jeffreys, appointed the head of the equity as well as the law of the realm, for his kindness in hanging five hundred people without the mere grief of trial. Nine out of ten of these people were innocent, it was true; but that proved the merit of the lord chief-justice so much the greater for hanging them, as showing what might be expected of him when he truly got hold of a guilty man. Now the king had seen the force of this argument, and, not being without gratitude for a high-seasoned dish of cruelty, had promoted the only man in England combining the gifts both of butcher and cook.

I did not even know at the time of Lord Jeffrey's high promotion. Not that my knowledge of this would have led me to act otherwise in the matter, for my object was to pay into an office, and not to any official; neither, if I had known the fact, could I have seen its bearing upon the receipt of my money. For the king's Exchequer is, meseemeth, of the common law; while Chancery is of equity, and well named for its many chances. But the true result of the thing was this—Lord Jeffreys, being now head of the law, and almost head of the kingdom, got possession of that money, and was kindly pleased with it.

And this met our second difficulty: for the law, having won and laughed over the spoil, must have injured its own title by impugning our legality.

Next, with regard to the women and children, we were long in a state of perplexity. We did our very best at the farm, and so did many others, to provide for them until they should manage about their own subsistence. And after a while this trouble went, as nearly all troubles go with time. Some of the women were taken back by their parents; and those who failed of this went forth to work. And most of the children went with their mothers, or were bound apprentices; only Carver Doone's handsome child had lost his mother, and stayed with me.

This boy went about with me everywhere. He had taken as much of liking to me as his father had of hatred; and I, perceiving his noble courage, scorn of lies, and high spirit, became almost as fond of Ensie as he was of me. He told us that his name was "Ensie," meant for "Ensor," I suppose, from his father's grandfather, the old Sir Ensor Doone. And this boy appeared to be Carver's heir.

However, although I loved the poor child, I could not help feeling very uneasy about the escape of his father, the savage and brutal Carver. This man was left to roam the country, homeless, foodless, and desperate, with his giant strength and great skill in arms, and the whole world to be revenged upon. For his escape the miners were answerable, but of the Counsellor's safe departure the burden lay on myself alone.

After the desperate charge of young Doones had been met by us and broken, I happened to descry a patch of white on the grass of the meadow, like the head of a sheep after washing-day. Observing with some curiosity how carefully this white thing moved along the bars of darkness betwixt the panels of fire-light, I ran up to intercept it before it reached the little postern which we used to call Gwenny's door. Perceiving me, the white thing stopped, and was making back again; but I ran up at full speed, and lo, it was the flowing, silvery hair of that sage, the Counsellor, who was scuttling away upon all fours, but now rose and confronted me.

"John," he said, "Sir John, you will not play falsely with your ancient friend among those violent fellows. I look to you to protect me, John."

"Honored sir, you are right," I replied; "but surely that posture was unworthy of yourself and your many resources. It is my intention to let you go free."

"I knew it. I could have sworn to it. You are a noble fellow, John. I said so from the very first; you are a noble fellow, and an ornament to any rank."

"But upon two conditions," I added, gently taking him by the arm; for, instead of displaying any desire for commune with my nobility, he was edging away towards the postern; "the first is that you tell me truly who it was that slew my father."

"I will tell you truly and frankly, John, however, painful to me to confess it. It was my son, Carver."

"I thought as much, or I felt as much, all along," I answered; "but the fault was none of yours, sir, for you were not even present."

"If I had been there it would not have happened. I am always opposed to violence. Therefore, let me haste away; this scene is against my nature."

"You shall go directly, Sir Counsellor, after meeting my other condition; which is, that you place in my hands Lady Lorna's diamond necklace."

"Ah, how often I have wished," said the old man, with a heavy sigh, "that it might yet be in my power to ease my mind in that respect, and to do a thoroughly good deed by lawful restitution."

"Then try to have it in your power, sir. Surely, with my encouragement, you might summon resolution."

"Alas, John, the resolution has been ready long ago, but the thing is not in my possesion. Carver, my son, who slew your father, upon him you will find the necklace. What are jewels to me, young man, at my time of life? Baubles and trash—I detest them, from the sins they have led me to answer for. When you come to my age, good Sir John, you will scorn all jewels, and care only for a pure and bright conscience. Ah! ah! Let me go."

He looked so hoary and so silvery and serene in the moonlight, that verily I must have believed him if he had not drawn in his breast.

With some apology for having recourse to strong measures, I thrust my hand inside his waistcoat and drew forth Lorna's necklace, purely sparkling in the moonlight like the dancing of new stars. The old man made a stab at me with a knife which I had not espied, but the vicious onset failed, and then he knelt and clasped his hands.

"Oh, John, my son, rob me not in that manner. They belong to me, and I love them so. I would give almost my life for them. There is one jewel there I can look at for hours, and see all the lights of heaven in it, which I never shall see elsewhere. All my wretched, wicked life—oh, John, I am a sad hypocrite—but give me

back my jewels; or else kill me here. I am a babe in your hands, but I must have back my jewels."

As his beautiful white hair fell away from his noble forehead like a silver wreath of glory, and his powerful face, for once, was moved with real emotion, I was so amazed and overcome by the grand contradictions of nature that verily I was on the point of giving him back the necklace. But honesty, which is said to be the first instinct of all Ridds, happened here to occur to me; and so I said, without more haste than might be expected:

"Sir Counsellor, I cannot give you what does not belong to me. But if you will show me that particular diamond which is heaven to you, I will take upon myself the risk and the folly of cutting it out for you. And with that you must go contented; and I beseech you not to starve with that jewel upon your lips."

Seeing no hope of better terms, he showed me his pet love of a jewel, and I thought of what Lorna was to me as I cut it out, with the hinge of my knife severing the snakes of gold, and placed it in his careful hand. Another moment, and he was gone and away through Gwenny's postern, and no one knows what became of him.

Now as to Carver the thing was this—so far as I could ascertain from the valiant miners, no two of whom told the same story, any more than one of them told it twice. The band of Doones which sallied forth for the robbery of the pretended convoy was met by Simon Carfax, according to arrangement, at the ruined house called the "Warren," in that part of Bagworthy Forest where the river Exe runs through it. The Warren, as all our people know, had belonged to a fine old gentleman whom every one called "The Squire," who had retreated from active life to pass the rest of his days in fishing and shooting and helping his neighbors; for he was a man of some substance, and no poor man ever left the Warren without a bag of good victuals and a few shillings in his pocket. However, this poor squire never made a greater mistake than in hoping to end his life peacefully upon the banks of a trout-stream, and in the green forest of Bagworthy. For, as he came home from the brook at dusk, with his fly-rod over his shoulder, the Doones fell upon him and murdered him, and then sacked his house and burned it.

Now this had made honest people timid about going past the Warren at night; for, of course, it was said that the old squire walked upon certain nights of the moon in and out the trunks of trees, on the green path from the river. On his shoulder he bore a fishing-rod, and his book of trout-flies in one hand, and on his back a wicker creel, and now and then he would burst out laughing to think of his coming so near the Doones.

And, now that one turns to consider it, this seems a strangely righteous thing, that the scene of one of the greatest crimes even by Doones committed should, after twenty years, become the scene of vengeance falling like hail from heaven upon them. For, although the Warren lies well away to the westward of the mine, and the gold, under escort to Bristowe or London, would have gone in the other direction, Captain Carfax, finding this place best suited for working of his design, had persuaded the Doones that, for reasons of government, the ore must go first to Barnstaple for inspection, or something of that sort. And as every one knows that our government sends all things westward when eastward bound, this had won the more faith for Simon, as being according to nature.

Now Simon, having met these flowers of the flock of villainy, where the rising moonlight flowed through the weir-work of the wood, begged them to dismount; and he led them with an air of mystery into the squire's ruined hall, black with fire and green with weeds.

"Captain, I have found a thing," he said to Carver Doone himself, "which may help to pass the hour ere the lump of gold comes by. The smugglers are a noble race, but a miner's eyes are a match for them. There lies a puncheon of rare spirit, with the Dutchman's brand upon it, hidden behind the broken hearth. Set a man to watch outside, and let us see what this be like."

With one accord they agreed to this, and Carver pledged Master Carfax, and all the Doones grew merry. But Simon being bound, as he said, to see to their strict sobriety, drew a bucket of water from the well into which they had thrown the dead owner, and begged them to mingle it with their drink, which some of them did, and some refused.

But the water from that well was poured, while they were

carousing, into the priming-pan of every gun of theirs, even as Simon had promised to do with the guns of the men they were come to kill.

Then, just as the giant Carver arose, with a glass of pure hollands in his hand, and by the light of the torch they had struck proposed the good health of the squire's ghost—in the broken doorway stood a press of men with pointed muskets covering every Doone. How it fared upon that I know not, having none to tell me; for each man wrought, neither thought of telling, nor whether he might be alive to tell. The Doones rushed to their guns at once, and pointed them, and pulled at them, but the squire's well had drowned their fire; and then they knew that they were betrayed, but resolved to fight like men for it. Enough that all the Doones fought bravely, and like men, though bad ones, died in the hall of the man they had murdered. And with them died poor young De Whichehalse, who, in spite of all his good father's prayers, had cast in his lot with the robbers. Carver Doone alone escaped, partly through his fearful strength and his yet more fearful face, but mainly, perhaps, through his perfect coolness, and his mode of taking things.

I am happy to say that no more than eight of the gallant miners were killed in that combat or died of their wounds afterwards; and adding to these the eight we had lost in our assault on the valley, it cost no more than sixteen lives to be rid of nearly forty Doones, each of whom would most likely have killed three men in the course of a year or two.

Yet, for Lorna's sake, I was vexed at the bold escape of Carver. Not that I sought for Carver's life any more than I did for the Counsellor's; but that for us it was no light thing to have a man of such power and resource and desperation left at large and furious, like a famished wolf round the sheepfold. Yet greatly as I blamed the yeomen, who were posted on their horses just out of shot from the Doone gate for the very purpose of intercepting those who escaped the miners, I could not get them to admit that any blame attached to them.

But lo, he had dashed through the whole of them, with his horse at full gallop, and was nearly out of shot before they began to think of shooting him. Then it appears, from what a boy said—

for boys manage to be everywhere—that Captain Carver rode through the Doone-gate, and so to the head of the valley. There, of course, he beheld all the houses, and his own among the number, flaming with a handsome blaze and throwing a fine light around, such as he often had revelled in when of other people's property But he swore the deadliest of all oaths, and, seeing himself to be vanquished, spurred his great black horse away, and passed into the darkness.

CHAPTER XLIX

HOW TO GET OUT OF CHANCERY

THINGS at this time so befell me that I cannot tell one-half, but am like a boy who has left his lesson unready, except with false excuses.

But the thing which next betided me was not a fall of any sort but rather a most glorious rise to the summit of all fortune. For in good truth it was no less than the return of Lorna—my Lorna, my own darling, in wonderful health and spirits, and as glad as a bird to get back again. It would have done any one good for a twelvemonth to behold her face and doings and her beaming eyes and smile, when this queen of every heart ran about our rooms again. She did love this, and she must see that, and where was her old friend the cat? All the house was full of brightness, as if the sun had come over the hill and Lorna were his mirror.

My mother sat in an ancient chair, and wiped her cheeks, and looked at her; and even Lizzie's eyes must dance to the freshness and joy of her beauty. As for me, you might call me mad, for I ran out and flung my best hat on the barn, and kissed Mother Fry till she made at me with the sugar-nippers.

What a quantity of things Lorna had to tell us! And yet how often we stopped her mouth—at least mother, I mean, and Lizzie—and she quite as often would stop her own, running up in her joy to some one of us! And then there arose the eating business, for how was it possible that our Lorna could have come all that way, and to her own Exmoor, without being terribly hungry?

"Oh, I do love it all so much," said Lorna, now for the fiftieth time, and not meaning only the victuals; "the scent of the gorse on the moors drove me wild, and the primroses under the hedges. I am sure I was meant for a farmer's—I mean, for a farm-house life, dear Lizzie"—for Lizzie was looking saucily—"just as you were meant for a soldier's bride, and for writing despatches of victory. And now, since you will not ask me, dear mother, in the

excellence of your manners, and even John has not the impudence, in spite of all his coat of arms—I must tell you a thing which I vowed to keep until tomorrow morning; but my resolution fails me. I am my own mistress—what think you of that, mother? I am my own mistress!"

"Then you shall not be so long," cried I, for mother seemed not to understand her, and sought about for her glasses; "darling, you shall be mistress of me, and I will be your master."

"A frank announcement of your intent and, beyond doubt, a true one; but surely unusual at this stage, and a little premature, John. However, what must be, must be." And with tears springing out of smiles, she fell on my breast, and cried a bit.

When I came to smoke a pipe over it, after the rest were gone to bed, I could hardly believe in my good luck. For here was I, without any merit except of bodily power and the absence of any falsehood, so placed that the noblest man in England might envy me and be vexed with me. For the noblest lady in all the land, and the purest, and the sweetest, hung upon my heart as if there was none to equal it.

I dwelt upon this matter long and very severely, while I smoked a new tobacco, brought by my own Lorna for me, and next to herself most delicious; and as the smoke curled away, I thought "Surely this is too fine to last for a man who never deserved it."

Seeing no way out of this, I resolved to place my faith in God and so went to bed and dreamed of it. And having no presence of mind to pray for anything under the circumstances, I thought it best to fall asleep, and trust myself to the future. Yet ere I fell asleep the roof above me swarmed with angels, having Lorna under it.

In the morning Lorna was ready to tell her story, and we to hearken; and she wore a dress of most simple stuff and yet perfectly wonderful by means of the shape and her figure. Lizzie was wild with jealousy, as might be expected, though never would Annie have been so, but have praised it, and craved for the pattern; and mother, not understanding it, looked forth, to be taught about it. For it was strange to note that lately my dear mother had lost her quickness, and was never quite brisk unless the question were about myself.

She had seen a great deal of trouble; and grief begins to close on people as their power of life declines. We said that she was hard of hearing; but my opinion was, that seeing me inclined for marriage made her think of my father, and so, perhaps, a little too much to dwell upon the courting of thirty years agone. Anyhow, she was the very best of mothers, and would smile and command herself and be as happy as could be in the doings of the younger folk.

But Lorna, in her bright young beauty and her knowledge of my heart, was not to be checked by any thoughts of haply coming evil. In the morning she was up even sooner than I was, and through all the corners of the hens, remembering every one of them. I caught her and saluted her with such warmth that she vowed she would never come out again; and yet she came the next morning!

Earl Brandir's ancient steward, in whose charge she had travelled with a proper escort, looked upon her as a lovely maniac; and the mixture of pity and admiration wherewith he regarded her was a strange thing to observe, especially after he had seen our simple house and manners. On the other hand, Lorna considered him a worthy but foolish old gentleman, to whom true happiness meant no more than money and high position.

These two last she had been ready to abandon wholly, and had in part escaped from them, as the enemies of her happiness. And she took advantage of the times in a truly clever manner. For that happened to be a time when everybody was only too glad to take money for doing anything. And the greatest money-taker in the kingdom was generally acknowledged to be the Lord Chief-Justice Jeffreys.

Upon his return from the Bloody Assizes with triumph and great glory, after hanging every man who was too poor to help it, he pleased his gracious majesty so purely with the description of it, that the king exclaimed, "This man alone is worthy to be at the head of the law." Accordingly in his hand was placed the great seal of England.

So it came to pass that Lorna's destiny hung upon Lord Jeffreys, for at this time Earl Brandir died, being taken with gout in the heart soon after I left London. Lorna was very sorry for

him, but as he had never been able to hear one tone of her sweet, silvery voice, it is not to be supposed that she wept without consolation. She grieved for him as we ought to grieve for any good man going, and yet with a comforting sense of the benefit which the blessed exchange must bring to him.

Now the Lady Lorna Dugal appeared to Lord Chancellor Jeffreys so exceeding wealthy a ward that the lock would pay for turning. Therefore he came, of his own accord, to visit her and to treat with her, having heard that this wealthy and beautiful maiden would not listen to any young lord, having pledged her faith to the plain John Ridd.

Thereupon our Lorna managed so to hold out golden hopes to the lord high-chancellor, that he saw his way to a heap of money. And there and then, upon surety of a certain round sum, he gave to his fair ward permission, under sign and seal, to marry that loyal knight, John Ridd, upon condition only that the king's consent should be obtained.

His majesty, well-disposed towards me for my previous service, and being moved, moreover, by the queen, who desired to please Lorna, consented without much hesitation upon the understanding that Lorna, when she became of full age, and the mistress of her property, should pay a heavy fine to the crown, and devote a fixed portion of her estate to the promotion of the holy Catholic faith, in a manner to be dictated by the king himself. Inasmuch, however, as King James was driven out of his kingdom before his arrangement could take effect, and another king succeeded, who desired not the promotion of the Catholic religion, neither hankered after subsidies whether French or English, that agreement was pronounced invalid, improper, and contemptible. However, there was no getting back the money once paid to Lord Chancellor Jeffreys.

But what thought we of money at this present moment, or of position, or anything else, except, indeed, one another? Lorna told me, with the sweetest smile, that if I were minded to take her at all, I must take her without anything; inasmuch as she meant, upon coming of age, to make over the residue of her estates to the next of kin, as being unfit for a farmer's wife. And I replied, with the greatest warmth and a readiness to worship her,

that this was exactly what I longed for, but had never dared to propose it. But dear mother looked most exceeding grave, and said that to be sure her opinion could not be expected to count for much, but she really hoped that in three years' time we should both be a little wiser, and have more regard for our interests, and perhaps those of others by that time; and our neighbor, Master Snowe, having daughters only, and nobody coming to marry them, if anything happened to the good old man—and who could tell in three years' time what might happen to all or any of us?—why, perhaps his farm would be for sale, and perhaps Lady Lorna's estates in Scotland would fetch enough money to buy it, and so throw the two farms into one.

That would be as my poor father had longed to do many and many a time, but not having a title could not arrange all quite as he wanted. And then if we young people grew tired of the old mother, as seemed only too likely and was according to nature, why, we could send her over there, and Lizzie to keep her company.

When mother had finished and wiped her eyes, Lorna, who had been blushing rosily at some portions of this great speech, flung her fair arms around mother's neck, and kissed her very heartily, and scolded her for her want of confidence in us. My mother replied that if anybody could deserve her John, it was Lorna; but that she could not hold with the rashness of giving up money so easily while her next of kin would be John himself, and who could tell what others, by the time she was one-and-twenty?

Hereupon, I felt that after all my mother had common-sense on her side, for if Master Snowe's farm should be for sale, it would be far more to the purpose than my coat of arms to get it; for there was a different pasture there, just suited for change of diet to our sheep as well as large cattle. And besides this, even with all Annie's skill, their butter would always command in the market from one to three farthings a pound more than ours. And few things vexed us more than this. Whereas, if we got possession of the farm, we might, without breach of the market laws or any harm done to any one, sell all our butter as Snowe butter, and do good to all our customers.

Thinking thus, yet remembering that Farmer Nicholas might hold out for another score of years, as I heartily hoped he might, or that, even without that, the farm might never be put up for sale, I begged my Lorna to do as she liked, or, rather, to wait and think of it, for as yet she could do nothing.

CHAPTER L.

DRIVEN BEYOND ENDURANCE

EVERYTHING was settled smoothly and without any fear or fuss, that Lorna might find end of troubles, and myself of eager waiting, with the help of Parson Bowden and the good wishes of two counties. I could scarce believe my fortune when I looked upon her beauty, gentleness, and sweetness, mingled with enough of humor, and warm woman's feeling, never to be dull or tiring, never themselves to be weary.

For she might be called a woman now, although a very young one and as full of playful ways, or perhaps I may say ten times as full, as if she had known no trouble. To wit, the spirit of bright childhood, having been so curbed and straitened ere its time was over, now broke forth, enriched and varied with the garb of conscious maidenhood. And the sense of steadfast and eager love enfolding her colored with so many tinges all her looks and words and thoughts, that to me it was the noblest vision even to think about her.

But, as all emotions find within us stronger echo and more perfect answer, so I could not be regardless of some hidden evil; and my dark misgivings deepened as the time drew nearer. I kept a steadfast watch on Lorna, neglecting a field of beans entirely, as well as a litter of young pigs, and a cow somewhat given to jaundice. And I let Jem Slocombe go to sleep in the meadow, all one afternoon, and Bill Dadds draw off a bucket of cider without so much as a "by your leave." For these men knew that my knighthood, and my coat of arms, and most of all my love, were greatly against good farming; the sense of our country being, and perhaps it may be sensible, that a man who sticks up to be anything must allow himself to be cheated.

But I never did stick up, nor would, though all the parish bade me; and I whistled the same tunes to my horses, and held my plough-tree just the same as if no king, nor queen had ever

come to spoil my tune or hand. For this thing nearly all the men around our parts upbraided me; but the women praised me and, for the most part, these are right, when themselves are not concerned.

However humble I might be, no one knowing anything of our part of the country would for a moment doubt that now here was a great to-do and talk of John Ridd and his wedding. The fierce fight with the Doones so lately, and my leading of the combat, and the vanishing of Sir Counsellor, and the galloping madness of Carver, had led to the broadest excitement about my wedding of Lorna. We heard that people meant to come from more than thirty miles around, upon excuse of seeing my stature and Lorna's beauty; but in good truth out of sheer curiosity, and the love of meddling.

Our clerk had given notice that not a man should come inside the door of his church without shilling-fee, and women must every one pay two shillings. I thought this wrong, and, as churchwarden, begged that the money might be paid into mine own hands when taken. But the clerk said that was against all law, and he had orders from the parson to pay it to him without any delay. So, as I always obey the parson when I care not much about a thing, I let them have it their own way, though feeling inclined to believe, sometimes, that I ought to have some of the money.

Dear mother arranged all the ins and outs of the way in which it was to be done; and Annie and Lizzie, and all the Snowes, and even Ruth Huckaback, who was there after great persuasion, made such a sweeping of dresses that I scarcely knew where to place my feet, and longed for a staff to put by their gowns. Then Lorna came out of a pew half-way in a manner which quite astonished me, and took my left hand in her right.

My darling looked so glorious that I was afraid of glancing at her, yet took in all her beauty. She was in a fright, no doubt, but nobody should see it; whereas I said, to myself at least, "I will go through it like a grave-digger."

Lorna's dress was of pure white, clouded with faint lavender for the sake of the old Earl Brandir, and as simple as need be, except for perfect loveliness. I was afraid to look at her, as I

said before, except when each of us said, "I will;" and then each dwelt upon the other.

It is impossible for any who have not loved as I have to conceive my joy and pride when, after ring and all was done, and the parson had blessed us, Lorna turned to look at me with her glances of subtle fun subdued by this great act.

Her eyes, which none on earth may ever equal or compare with, told me such a depth of comfort, yet awaiting further commune, that I was almost amazed, thoroughly as I knew them. Darling eyes, the sweetest eyes, the loveliest, the most loving eyes —and the sound of a shot rang through the church, and those eyes were filled with death.

Lorna fell across my knees when I was going to kiss her, as the bridegroom is allowed to do and encouraged, if he needs it. A flood of blood came out upon the yellow wood of the altar steps; and at my feet lay Lorna, trying to tell me some last message out of her faithful eyes. I lifted her up and petted her, and coaxed her, but it was no good; the only sign of life remaining was a spirit of bright red blood.

Some men know what things befall them in the supreme time of their life—far above the time of death—but to me comes back as a hazy dream, without any knowledge in it, what I did, or felt, or thought, with my wife's arms flagging, flagging, around my neck, as I raised her up, and softly put them there. She sighed a long sigh on my breast for her last farewell to life, and then she grew so cold that I asked the time of year.

It was now Whit-Tuesday, and the lilacs all in blossom; and why I thought of the time of year, with the young death in my arms, God, or his angels, may decide, having so strangely given us. Enough that so I did, and looked; and our white lilacs were beautiful. Then I laid my wife in my mother's arms, and begging that no one would make a noise, went forth for my revenge.

Of course, I knew who had done it. There was but one man in the world, or at any rate, in our part of it, who could have done such a thing—such a thing. I used no harsher word about it, while I leaped upon our best horse, with bridle but no saddle, and set the head of Kickums towards the course now pointed out to

The sound of a shot rang through the church . . . Lorna fell as I was going to kiss her.

me. Who showed me the course I cannot tell. I only know that I took it. And the men fell back before me.

Weapon of no sort had I. Unarmed, and wondering at my strange attire, with a bridal vest wrought by our Annie and red with the blood of the bride, I went forth just to find out this; whether in this world there be or be not justice.

With my vicious horse at a furious speed, I came upon Black Barrow Down, directed by some shout of men which seemed to me but a whisper. And there, about a furlong before me, rode a man on a great black horse, and I knew that the man was Carver Doone.

"Your life, or mine," I said to myself; "but we two live not upon this earth one more hour, together."

I knew the strength of this great man, and I knew that he was armed with a gun—if he had time to load again, after shooting my Lorna—or, at any rate, with pistols, and a horseman's sword as well. Nevertheless, I had no more doubt of killing the man before me than a cook has of spitting a headless fowl.

Sometimes seeing no ground beneath me, and sometimes heeding every leaf, and the crossing of the grass-blades, I followed over the long moor, reckless whether seen or not. But only once the other man turned round and looked back again, and then I was beside a rock, with a reedy swamp behind me.

Although he was so far before me, and riding as hard as ride he might, I saw that he had something on the horse in front of him—something which needed care, and stopped him from looking backward. In the whirling of my wits I fancied first that this was Lorna, until the scene I had been through fell across hot brain and heart, like the drop at the close of a tragedy. Rushing there through crag and quag, at utmost speed of a maddened horse, I saw the brutal deed, the piteous anguish, and the cold despair.

The man turned up the gully leading from the moor to Cloven Rocks, through which John Fry had tracked Uncle Ben. But as Carver entered it he turned round, and beheld me not a hundred yards behind; and I saw that he was bearing his child, little Ensie, before him. Ensie also descried me, and stretched his hands and cried to me, for the face of his father frightened him.

Carver Doone, with a vile oath, thrust spurs into his flagging horse and laid one hand on a pistol-stock, whence I knew that his

slung carbine had received no bullet since the one that had pierced Lorna. And a cry of triumph rose from the black depths of my heart. What cared I for pistols? I had no spurs, neither was my horse one to need the rowel; I rather held him in than urged him, for he was fresh as ever; and I knew that the black steed in front, if he breasted the steep ascent where the track divided, must be in our reach at once.

His rider knew this, and, having no room in the rocky channel to turn and fire, drew rein at the crossways sharply and plunged into the black ravine leading to the Wizard's Slough. "Is it so?" I said to myself, with brain and head cold as iron; "though the foul fiend come from the slough to save thee, thou shalt carve it, Carver."

I followed my enemy carefully, steadily, even leisurely; for I had him as in a pitfall whence no escape might be. He thought that I feared to approach him, for he knew not where he was; and his low, disdainful laugh came back. "Laugh he who wins," thought I.

A gnarled and half-starved oak, as stubborn as my own resolve and smitten by some storm of old, hung from the crag above me. Rising from my horse's back, although I had no stirrups, I caught a limb and tore it from the socket. Men show the rent even now with wonder, none with more wonder than myself.

Carver Doone turned the corner suddenly on the black and bottomless bog; with a start of fear he reined back his horse, and I thought he would have turned upon me. But instead of that he again rode on, hoping to find a way round the side.

Now there is a way between cliff and slough for those who know the ground thoroughly, or have time enough to search it; but for him there was no road, and he lost some time in seeking it. Upon this he made up his mind and wheeling, fired, and then rode at me.

His bullet struck me somewhere, but I took no heed of that. Fearing only his escape, I laid my horse across the way, and with the limb of the oak struck full on the forehead his charging steed. Ere the slash of the sword came nigh me, man and horse rolled over, and well-nigh bore my own horse down with the power of their onset.

For the first time in his life Carver Doone had found his master.

—*Page 342*

Carver Doone was somewhat stunned, and could not arise for a moment. Meanwhile I leaped on the ground and awaited, smoothing my hair back and baring my arms, as though in the ring for wrestling. Then the little boy ran to me, clasped my leg, and looked up at me; and the terror in his eyes made me almost fear myself.

"Ensie, dear," I said quite gently, grieving that he should see his wicked father killed, "run up yonder round the corner, and try to find a pretty bunch of bluebells for the lady." The child obeyed me, hanging back and looking back, and then laughing while I prepared for business. There and then I might have killed mine enemy with a single blow while he lay unconscious, but it would have been foul play.

With a sullen and black scowl the Carver gathered his mighty limbs, and arose, and looked round for his weapons; but I had put them well away. Then he came to me and gazed, being wont to frighten thus young men.

"I would not harm you, lad," he said, with a lofty style of sneering; "I have punished you enough for most of your impertinence. For the rest I forgive you, because you have been good and gracious to my little son Go, and be contented."

For answer, I smote him on the cheek, lightly, and not to hurt him, but to make his blood leap up. I would not sully my tongue by speaking to a man like this.

There was a level space of sward between us and the slough. With the courtesy derived from London and the processions I had seen, to this place I led him. And that he might breathe himself, and have every fibre cool and every muscle ready, my hold upon his coat I loosed, and left him to begin with me whenever he thought proper.

I think he felt that his time was come. I think he knew from my knitted muscles, and the firm arch of my breast, and the way in which I stood, but, most of all, from my stern blue eyes, that he had found his master. At any rate, a paleness came—an ashy paleness on his cheeks, and the vast calves of his legs bowed in as if he were out of training.

Seeing this, villain as he was, I offered him first chance. I stretched forth my left hand, as I do to a weaker antagonist, and

I let him have a hug of me. But in this I was too generous, having forgotten my pistol-wound, and the cracking of one of my short lower ribs. Carver Doone caught me round the waist with such a grip as never yet had been laid upon me.

I heard my rib go; I grasped his arm, and tore the muscle out of it; then I took him by the throat, which is not allowed in wrestling; but he had snatched at mine and now was no time of dalliance. In vain he tugged and strained and writhed, dashed his bleeding fist into my face, and flung himself on me with gnashing jaws. Beneath the iron of my strength, I had him helpless in two minutes, and his fiery eyes lolled out.

"I will not harm thee any more," I cried, so far as I could for panting, the work being very furious; "Carver Doone, thou art beaten; own it, and go thy way, and repent thyself."

It was all too late. Even if he had yielded in his ravening frenzy—for his beard was like a mad dog's jowl—even if he would have owned that, for the first time in his life, he had found his master, it was all too late.

The black bog had him by the feet; the sucking of the ground drew on him, like the thirsty lips of death. In our fury, we had heeded neither wet nor dry, nor thought of earth beneath us. I myself could scarcely leap, with the last spring of o'erlabored legs, from the engulfing grave of slime. He fell back, with his swarthy breast, from which my grip had rent all clothing, like a hummock of bog-oak standing out the quagmire; and then he tossed his arms to heaven, and they were black to the elbow, and the glare of his eyes was ghastly. I could only gaze and pant, for my strength was no more than an infant's, from the fury and the horror. Scarcely could I turn away, while, joint by joint, he sank from sight.

CHAPTER LI

LIFE AND LORNA COME AGAIN

WHEN the little boy came back with the bluebells, which he had managed to find—as children always do find flowers when older eyes see none—the only sign of his father left was a dark brown bubble upon a new-formed patch of blackness. But to the centre of its pulpy gorge the greedy slough was heaving, and sullenly grinding its weltering jaws among the flags and the sedges.

With pain and ache both of mind and body, and shame at my own fury, I heavily mounted my horse again, and looked down at the innocent Ensie. Would this playful, loving child grow up like his cruel father, and end a godless life of hatred with a death of violence? He lifted his noble forehead towards me, as if to answer, "Nay, I will not," but the words he spoke were these:

"Don"—for he never could say "John"—"oh, Don, I am so glad that naughty man is gone away. Take me home, Don; take me home."

"It has been said of the wicked, "not even their own children love them;" and I could easily believe that Carver Doone's cold-hearted ways had scared from him even his favorite child. No man would I call truly wicked, unless his heart be cold.

It hurt me more than I can tell, even through all other grief, to take into my arms the child of the man just slain by me. The feeling was a foolish one, and a wrong one, nevertheless my arms went coldly round that little fellow; neither would they have gone at all, if there had been any help for it. But I could not leave him there till some one else might fetch him on account of the cruel slough and the ravens which had come hovering over the dead horse; neither could I, with my wound, tie him on my horse and walk.

For now I had spent a great deal of blood, and was rather faint and weary. And it was lucky for me that Kickums had lost spirit, like his master, and went home as mildly as a lamb. For, when

we came towards the farm I seemed to be riding in a dream almost; and the voices both of men and women, who had hurried forth upon my track, as they met me, seemed to wander from a distant muffling cloud. Only the thought of Lorna's death, like a heavy knell, was tolling in the belfry of my brain.

When we came to the stable door I rather fell from my horse than got off; and John Fry, with a look of wonder, took Kickums's head and led him in. Into the old farmhouse I tottered like a weanling child, with mother in her common clothes helping me along, yet fearing, except by stealth, to look at me.

"I have killed him," was all I said, "even as he killed Lorna. Now let me see my wife, mother; she belongs to me none the less, though dead."

"You cannot see her now, dear John," said Ruth Huckaback, coming forward, since no one else had the courage. "Annie is with her now, John."

"What has that to do with it? Let me see my dead one, and pray to die."

All the women fell away, and whispered, and looked at me with side glances and some sobbing; for my face was hard as flint. Ruth alone stood by me, and dropped her eyes, and trembled. Then one little hand of hers stole into my great shaking palm, and the other was laid on my tattered coat; yet with her clothes she shunned my blood, while she whispered gently:

"John she is not your dead one. She may even be your living one yet, your wife, your home, and your happiness. But you must not see her now."

"Is there any chance for her? For me, I mean; for me, I mean?"

"God in heaven knows, dear John. But the sight of you, and in this sad plight, would be certain death to her. Now come first, and be healed yourself."

I obeyed her like a child, whispering only as I went, for none but myself knew her goodness: "Almighty God will bless you, darling, for the good you are doing now."

Tenfold, ay, and a thousandfold, I prayed and I believed it, when I came to know the truth. If it had not been for this little maid, Lorna must have died at once, as in my arms she lay for

dead, from the dastard and murderous cruelty. But the moment I left her Ruth came forward and took the command of every one, in right of her firmness and readiness.

She made them bear her home at once upon the door of the pulpit, with the cushion under the drooping head. With her own little hands she cut off the bridal-dress so steeped and stained, and then with her dainty transparent fingers, no larger than a pencil, she probed the vile wound in the side, and fetched the reeking bullet forth; and then with the coldest water stanched the flowing of the life-blood. All this while my darling lay insensible and white as death, and all the women around declared that she was dead, and needed nothing but her maiden shroud.

But Ruth still sponged the poor side and forehead, and watched the long eyelashes flat upon the marble cheek, and laid her pure face on the faint heart, and bade them fetch her Spanish wine. Then she parted the pearly teeth, feebly clenched on the hovering breath, and poured in wine from a christening spoon, and raised the graceful neck and breast, and stroked the delicate throat, and waited; and then poured in a little more.

Annie all the while looked on with horror and amazement, counting herself no second-rate nurse, and this as against all theory. But the quiet lifting of Ruth's hand and one glance from her dark bright eyes, told Annie just to stand away, and not intercept the air so. And at the very moment when all the rest had settled that Ruth was a simple idiot, but could not harm the dead much, a little flutter in the throat, followed by a short, low sigh, made them pause, and look and hope.

For hours, however, and days, she lay at the very verge of death, kept alive by nothing but the care, the skill, the tenderness, and perpetual watchfulness of Ruth. Luckily Annie was not there very often so as to meddle, for kind and clever nurse as she was, she must have done more harm than good. But my broken rib, which was set by a doctor who chanced to be at the wedding, was alloted to Annie's care; and great inflammation ensuing, it was quite enough to content her. This doctor had pronounced poor Lorna dead; wherefore Ruth refused most firmly to have aught to do with him. She took the whole case on herself, and she bore it through.

Now whether it were the light and brightness of my Lorna's nature, or the freedom from anxiety—for she knew not of my hurt—but anyhow, one thing is certain; sure as the stars of hope above us, Lorna recovered, long ere I did.

For the grief was on me still of having lost my love at the moment she was mine. With the power of fate upon me, and the black caldron of the wizard's death boiling in my heated brain, I had no faith in the tales they told. I believed that Lorna was in the churchyard, while these rogues were lying to me. For with strength of blood like mine and power of heart behind it, a broken bone must burn itself.

Mine went hard with fires of pain, being of such size and thickness; and I was ashamed of it for breaking by reason of a pistol-ball and the mere hug of a man. And it fetched me down in conceit of strength; so that I was careful afterwards.

All this was a lesson to me. All this made me very humble; illness being a thing, as yet, altogether unknown to me. Not that I cried small, or skulked, or feared the death which some foretold, shaking their heads about mortification and a green appearance. Only that I seemed quite fit to go to heaven and Lorna. For in my sick distracted mind, like the bead in a spread of frog-spawn carried by the current, hung the black and central essence of my future life, A life without Lorna; a tadpōle life. All stupid head, and no body.

My dearest mother was a show, with crying and with fretting. The Doones, as she thought, were born to destroy us. Scarce had she come to some liveliness after her great bereavement, and ten year's time to dwell on it—when, lo, here was her husband's son, the pet child of her own good John, murdered like his father!

This is not edifying talk. Therefore let me only tell what became of Lorna. One day I was sitting in my bedroom, for I could not get downstairs, and there was no one strong enough to carry me even if I would have allowed it.

Though it cost me sore trouble and weariness, I had put on all my Sunday clothes out of respect for the doctor, who was coming to bleed me again as he always did twice a week; and it struck me that he had seemed hurt in his mind, because I wore my worst

clothes to be bled in—for lie in bed I would not, after six o'clock; and even that was great laziness.

I looked at my right hand, whose grasp had been like that of a blacksmith's vise, and it seemed to myself impossible that this could be John Ridd's. The great frame of the hand was there, as well as the muscles, standing forth like the guttering of a candle, and the broad blue veins going up the back, and crossing every finger. But as for color, even Lorna's could scarcely have been whiter; and as for strength, little Ensie Doone might have come and held it fast. I laughed as I tried in vain to lift the basin set for bleeding me.

Then I thought of all the lovely things going on out of doors just now, concerning which the drowsy song of the bees came to me. These must be among the thyme, by the sound of their great content. Therefore the roses must be in blossom, and the woodbine, and clove gillyflower; the cherries on the wall must be turning red, the yellow sally must be on the book, wheat must be callow with quavering bloom, and the early meadows swathed with hay.

Yet here was I, a helpless creature, quite unfit to stir among them, gifted with no sight, no scent of all the changes that move our love, and lead our hearts from month to month along the quiet path of life. And what was worse, I had no hope of caring ever for them more.

Presently a little knock sounded through my gloomy room, and supposing it to be the doctor, I tried to rise and make my bow. But to my surprise it was little Ruth, who had never once come to visit me since I was placed under the doctor's hands. Ruth was dressed so gaily with rosettes, and flowers, and what not, that I was sorry for her bad manners and thought she was come to conquer me, now that Lorna was done with.

Ruth ran towards me with sparkling eyes, being rather short of sight; then suddenly she stopped, and I saw entire amazement in her face.

"Can you receive visitors, Cousin Ridd?—why, they never told me of this!" she cried; "I knew that you were weak, dear John, but not that you were dying. Whatever is that basin for?"

"I have no intention of dying, Ruth, and I like not to talk

about it. But that basin, if you must know, is for the doctor's purpose."

"What, do you mean bleeding you? You poor weak cousin? Is it possible that he does that still?"

"Twice a week for the last six weeks, dear. Nothing else has kept me alive."

"Nothing else has killed you, nearly. There!" and she set her little boot across the basin, and crushed it. "Not another drop shall they have from you. Is Annie such a fool as that? And Lizzie, like a zany, at her books! And killing their brother between them!"

I was surprised to see Ruth excited, her character being so calm and quiet. And I tried to soothe her with my feeble hand as now she knelt before me.

"Dear cousin, the doctor must know best. Annie says so, every day. Else what has he been brought up for?"

"Brought up for slaying and murdering. Twenty doctors killed King Charles, in spite of all the women. Will you leave it to me, John? I have a little will of my own, and I am not afraid of doctors. Will you leave it to me, dear John? I have saved your Lorna's life. And now I will save yours; which is a far, far easier business."

"You have saved my Lorna's life! What do you mean by talking so?"

"Only what I say, Cousin John. Though perhaps I over-prize my work. But, at any rate, she says so."

"I do not understand," I said, falling back with bewilderment," "all women are such liars."

"Have you ever known me to tell a lie?" cried Ruth in great indignation.

If ever there was virtuous truth in the eyes of any woman, it was now in Ruth Huckaback's; and my brain began very slowly to move, the heart being almost torpid from perpetual loss of blood.

"I do not understand," was all I could say for a very long time.

"Will you understand if I show you Lorna? I have feared to do it for the sake of you both. But now Lorna is well enough,

It is not a moment to describe, who feels can never tell of it.

—*Page 349*

if you think that you are, Cousin John. Surely you will understand, when you see your wife."

Following her to the very utmost of my mind and heart, I felt that all she said was truth, and yet I could not make it out. And in her last few words there was such a power of sadness rising through the cover of gayety, that I said to myself, half in a dream, "Ruth is very beautiful."

Before I had time to listen much for the approach of footsteps Ruth came back, and behind her Lorna, coy as if of her bridegroom, and hanging back with her beauty. Ruth banged the door and ran away, and Lorna stood before me.

She did not stand for an instant when she saw what I was like. At the risk of all thick bandages, and upsetting a dozen medicine bottles, and scattering leeches right and left, she managed to get into my arms, although they could not hold her. She laid her panting, warm young breast on the place where they meant to bleed me, and she set my pale face up; and she would not look at me, having greater faith in kissing.

I felt my life come back, and warm; I felt my trust in women flow; I felt the joy of living now, and the power of doing it. It is not a moment to describe; who feels can never tell it. But the rush of Lorna's tears, and the challenge of my bride's lips, and the throbbing of my wife's heart, now at last at home on mine, made me feel that the world was good and not a thing to be weary of.

Little more have I to tell. The doctor was turned out at once; and slowly came back my former strength, with a darling wife and good victuals. As for Lorna, she never tired of sitting and watching me eat and eat. And such is her heart that she never tires of being with me here and there among the beautiful places, and talking with her arm around me—so far, at least, as it can go, though half of mine may go round her—of the many fears and troubles, dangers and discouragements, and, worst of all, the bitter partings which we used to have, somehow.

There is no need for my farming harder than becomes a man of weight. Lorna has great stores of money, though we never draw it out, except for some poor neighbor, unless I find her a sumptuous dress out of her perquisites. And this she always looks

upon as a wondrous gift from me, and kisses me much when she puts it on, and walks like the noble woman she is. And yet I may never behold it again, for she gets back to her simple clothes, and I love her the better in them. I believe that she gives half the grandeur away, and keeps the other half for the children.

As for poor Tom Faggus, every one knows his bitter adventures, when his pardon was recalled because of his journey to Sedgemoor. Not a child in the country, I doubt, but knows far more than I do of Tom's most desperate doings. The law had ruined him once, he said; and then he had been too much for the law; and now that a quiet life was his object, here the base thing came after him. And such was his dread of this evil spirit, that, being caught upon Barnstaple Bridge with soldiers at either end of it he set his strawberry mare, sweet Winnie, at the left-hand parapet, with a whisper into her dove-colored ear. Without a moment's doubt she leaped it into the foaming tide, and swam, and landed according to orders. Also his flight from a public-house, where a trap was set for him, but Winnie came and broke down the door and put two men under and trod on them, is as well known as any ballad.

It was reported for a while that poor Tom had been caught at last by means of his fondness for liquor, and was hanged before Taunton jail, but luckily we knew better. With a good wife and a wonderful horse, and all the country attached to him, he kept the law at a wholesome distance, until it became too much for its master and a new king arose. Upon this Tom sued his pardon afresh; and Jeremy Stickles, who suited the times, was glad to help him in getting it, as well as a compensation. Thereafter the good and respectable Tom lived a godly life, and brought up his children to honesty as the first of all qualifications.

My dear mother was as happy as possibly need be with us, having no cause for jealousy as others arose around her. And everybody was well pleased when Lizzie came in one day and tossed her book-shelf over, and declared that she would have Captain Bloxham, and nobody should prevent her; for that he alone, of all the men she had ever met with, knew good writing when he saw it, and could spell a word when told. As he had now succeeded to Captain Stickles's position, and had the power of collecting and

of keeping what he liked, there was nothing to be said against it, and we hoped that he would pay her out.

I sent little Ensie to Blundell's school at my own cost and charges, having changed his name for fear of what any one might do to him. I called him Ensie Jones, and I think that he will be a credit to us. For the bold, adventurous nature of the Doones broke out in him; and we got him a commission, and, after many scrapes of spirit, he did great things in the Low Countries. He looks upon me as his father, and without my leave will not lay claim to the heritage and title of the Doones which clearly belong to him.

Ruth Huckaback is not married yet, although upon Uncle Reuben's death she came into all his property; except, indeed, two thousand pounds, which Uncle Ben, in his driest manner, bequeathed "to Sir John Ridd, the worshipful knight, for greasing of the testator's boots." And he left almost a mint of money, not from the mine, but from the shop, and the good use of usury. For the mine had brought in just what it cost when the vein of gold ended suddenly, leaving all concerned much older, and some, I fear, much poorer; but no one utterly ruined, as is the case with most of them. Ruth herself was his true mine, as upon his death-bed he found. I know a man even worthy of her; and though she is not very young, he loves her as I love Lorna. It is my firm conviction, that in the end, he will win her; and I do not mean to dance again except at dear Ruth's wedding, if the floor be strong enough.

Of Lorna, of my lifelong darling, of my more and more loved wife, I will not talk; for it is not seemly that a man should exalt his pride. Year by year her beauty grows, with the growth of goodness, kindness, and true happiness—above all, with loving. For change, she makes a joke of this, and plays with it, and laughs at it; and then, when my slow nature marvels, back she comes to the earnest thing. And if I wish to pay her out for something very dreadful—as may happen once or twice, when we become too gladsome—I bring her to forgotten sadness, and to me for cure of it, by the two words, "Lorna Doone."

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